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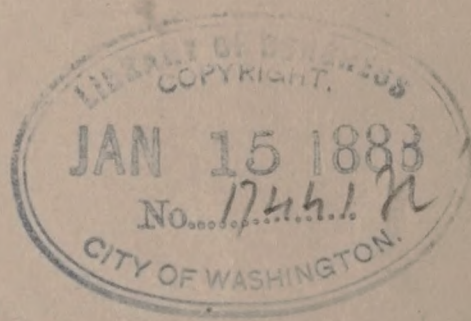
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

KARIN.

FROM THE GERMAN OF WILHELM JENSEN,

BY

LILLIE A. MERCUR.



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*“König Gustav lieb’ ich gewisslich sehr,
Doch Gustav Rosen vergesse ich nimmermehr.”*

KARIN.

CHAPTER I.

These are the falls of Trollhatta. They have thundered here thousands and thousands of years before a human ear was nigh to hear them. They dash their silvery spray far out over the rocks, and the sunlight glistens and glitters upon it in gladsome colors. But beneath the dazzling, majestic veil the rushing and roaring waters are surging and sighing.

These are the falls of Trollhatta. The centuries are lost in the voice of their thunder. The boy who played by their side grew to manhood and his hair whitens. And when for the last time he totters out to them upon his staff, they are as on the day when first he beheld them, bordered with flowers like the Spring, and snow white like the Winter.

Well for him who would forget to sit upon their brink, for the falling waters deaden memory. They approach like the fate of man, peaceful and transparent, kissing the nodding grasses that bend above them. Then a whirl and a more rapid rushing—unconscious of impending evil—but the stillness and transparency are gone, never more to return. Faster they glide along, impelled by an imperative and irresistible force, till they are drawn at length into the devouring chasm below.

When the first forms of men—with flat faces and projecting cheek-bones, yellow hair above pallid brows, thin beards clinging like dried autumnal grasses to their chins, and shaggy skins about their loins,—came chasing the reindeer from the forests of the South, they were greeted by the thunder of the Trollhatta. Was it years, was it ages, that they dwelt by its waters? They wrote no books which bear record of it, only the waves of Trollhatta murmured their history. It was dyed red with their blood, shed by the palefaced conquerors whom the Baltic brought hither in clumsy boats. As irresistible and incessant as the falling

waters of Trollhatta, the people of Europe pressed onward. Then hymns of praise to Odin resounded on its shores, and his descendants came down to earth, and ruled over the tribes of the Goths and Swedes. They were called Ynglings, and styled themselves Kings of Upsala. Centuries came and went. They who would hear this record of ancient days, how they sank never to return into the all-devouring abyss of time, may read it in the thunder of Trollhatta.

And again the South gave birth to a mighty volcanic movement, and the Baltic bore it across. The message of Christianity penetrated to the rocky fastness of the Schneehattan, and a powerful race called Folkungs, mounted the Swedish throne. They built up a mighty empire, but as its boundaries widened, greed, avarice and ambition stepped in, and they who had risen highest fell crushed to the depths below, like the seething waters of Trollhatta.

Then across the narrow strait that divides Sweden from Zealand, came for the first time the descendants of the old Normans who had established on sea-girt islands the kingdom of the Vikings. A firm hand united the small Danish nation so that it boldly opposed the mightiest, and Sweden, weakened by party strife, fell an easy prey. A few miles from the falls of Trollhatta, at Falkoping, the country fell into the hands of a woman, and Margaret of Denmark ruled with a victor's haughtiness over the descendants of Odin.

Gloom and anger brooded over Trollhatta. He who sat by its sullen waves must have heard how it proclaimed in its thundering fall from the height the insolence of the oppressor, and muttered in the depths with hollow reverberation the shame of the oppressed.

Had Karl Knutson caught their hidden meaning that, grasping his sword, he hewed the Danish chains asunder?

Mayhap, but those who succeeded him heed-

ed it little. The nobles of the land, jealous of the supreme power, would no longer submit to the sovereignty of the king. For though Sten Sture was nominally invested with the royal dignity and handed it down to son and grandson the imperious nobility acknowledged them only as regents, and profited by every occasion to lessen their real authority. Mournfully flowed Trollhatta's waters, for the glory and greatness of Sweden was an idle name. Upon it rested the shadow of the Union of Calmar, established by its first victor Margaret, and by virtue of which the kings of Denmark were equally entitled to the crowns of Sweden and Norway. The short-sighted Swedish nobility may have been blinded by the fact that none of the descendants had been strong enough to enforce the claim—the waters of Trollhatta could not be deceived, they rolled with thundering warning to meet the grandson of Margaret, when he sprang, sword in hand, to the Swedish coast, to secure by force the crown of the Calmaric Union. Once again, it is true, they rose in exultation when Christian II., after a bloody struggle at Brannkyrka, fled before Sten Sture, but he again advanced and Sten Sture fell. The firm, benevolent hand, which had bent the obstinate wills of the nobles to the welfare of the land, lay lifeless in the dust, and Christian II. grasped with a smile the crown which the Swedish nobility proffered him more readily than if one of their number had aspired to the golden circlet. He placed the crown upon his head in the church at Stockholm; he received the Sacrament with a holy oath to respect the Constitution of Sweden, and freely to forgive the past. Merriment and rejoicing reigned in the streets of Stockholm through three November days. Night was turned to day, for the sun rose ere the lights burned dim in the royal castle. The glasses of the united Swedish nobility clashed in praise of the most genial of kings, and Christian II. strode smiling through the uproarious, wine-heated crowd, embraced the bishops, kissed the counsellors of state, and tendered the right hand of fellowship to the burgomaster of Stockholm. Then clapping his hands merrily, he sang a jovial song in honor of his stammering guests. Only the waters of Trollhatta flowed darkly, mysteriously, and bore the dead leaves which the autumn wind scattered upon its breast onward with rapid eddies into the abyss.

CHAPTER II.

Three centuries and a half have passed since

that fair and beautiful November day of the year 1520.

The setting sun gilded the red roofs of the Naples of the North, and mirrored itself in fiery red on the quiet surface of Lake Malar. To the casual beholder autumnal peace rested upon Sweden's capital; autumnal stillness, too, contrasting strangely with the noisy uproar which shortly before had filled streets and markets.

Even to-day the more central tracts of Sweden are for their broad expanse a thinly populated region, though marking a five-fold increase since the time of which we write. The great lakes and the rocks remain, but between there now extend many miles of cultivated land, which was then a desolate waste. Three immeasurable expanses of water, the Lakes Malar, Hielmar and Wener, stretch from east to west through almost the entire breadth of the land, and are joined to the southward by the mighty length of Lake Wetter. They alternate with valleys and rocky elevations, melancholy forests of pine and cheerful groves of beech. And upon all, as upon the roofs of the capital, lies November's evening sun, not like the precursor of December, but of May, the northern month of spring; upon the silent waters of Hielmar, as upon the noiseless, long-reaching waves of Malar, when plumed gently against the broad steps of the Stockholm castle; upon the pointed spires of village churches, as upon the warlike pinnacles of solitary, scattered castles, which tower above the brown foliage between sparkling water-stretches. Farther, to the West upon the sea-like surface of Lake Wener with its numberless islands, from whose southernmost point the broad Göta-Elf flows to the Kattegat.

Then come the falls of Trollhatta. The boatman of Lake Wener hears their warning note through the still air. Miles away, the shepherd in the field hears it; high in the air, the bird of passage alters its course in fear at the noise of its thunder, which increases at every onward step. Then the ear is deafened, and with a shudder the eye glances over the white-heaving mass, which dashes over the jagged shelf of rock down into the awful chasm. Bare, precipitous granite shores receive them then, rising perpendicularly, like walls built by giant hand to force back the wild, unruly waves into their channel. Here and there a solitary tree clings to the rocky slab, its westward bending crown swaying in the evening wind, the messenger of the departing sun, which was wafted at slow intervals across Lake Wener, brushing over the brown moss at the summit of the cataract,

and as it swept by in the train of the sinking sun, gently plucking with invisible hand the last leaves from the tree tops, and bearing them in dallying flight over the steep declivity to the brink of the precipice. Merrily they fluttered over the sombre ground, a moment more and the damp spray of the Trollhatta had engulfed them.

Time and again the same play was repeated. Melancholy nature seemed thereby to enliven her solitude, unconcerned whether or no it was observed by human eyes.

But a hand grasps at one of the leaves floating by in pursuit of the others; and two great, quiet eyes watch it all.

Stony soil sparsely covered with moss and heather, stretched up some hundred feet from the brink of Trollhatta to a barren height upon which stood three of those trees which rocked their leafless boughs towards the blue horizon. Now and then a ledge of rock projected like a broad table or an artificial giant's seat, and from one of these, not far from the central tree, the hand was lifted in the air.

It was as slender and the fingers as delicate and transparent as those of Freya might have been, when she guided with silver reins her golden-maned steeds. The round, uplifted arm, a reflex of soft color, was outlined like marble against the sky.

Was it indeed Freya, come down to seek Odin sitting on the ancient Odin stone? The poets sang of her that eternal spring dwelt in her eye, and never-fading light upon her brow and cheek. And light was all proceeding from her.

Golden light streamed from the parted hair, which as she thus sat fell upon the grey stones about her. The evening sun shed lingering rays upon it, so that you might not have told where the golden threads of the hair ended, and those of the sun began. Against the blue arch of sky it was as when deep down in the earth the miner catches the first gleam of a sparkling vein in the dull rock. His first thought is not possession, not the worth of the treasure, but he gazes in a dreamy trance of delight at the sweet, passive secret of nature thus disclosed to view.

So she sat, like some sweet secret risen from Trollhatta's depths to bathe her white brow for a moment in the glowing red of the sunset.

Was it damp and chill below, and had she come to let the rosy glow of life encircle her once more, before the long winter held her captive in his icy bands?

No, there was another and a different light upon her. Though the hair might turn to liquid gold in the water's depths, arm and brow and

throat freeze to polished alabaster; there was no jewel of the deep from which nature's magic could have formed such eyes. They belonged to the upper world, to the northern heaven, which had lain in them all its mystic light, its sadness and its serenity, its nameless charm of laughter and tears.

She might be each of its fair inhabitants. Gefione, the goddess of chastity, the protector of maidenhood on earth. Hylla, the fair-haired, and Gna, who floats upon the sunbeam. Hlyn who gently kisses away the tears of misery. Siöena, who divinely stirs the sweetest emotions of the heart. And she might be Lobna in whose presence neither hate nor discord can exist. Wara whose look searches out each secret of the breast, and Synia, the lovely guardian of heaven.

But poets took what was loveliest in each, and fashioned therefrom Freya, the fairest of Walhalla's goddesses. Her eyes they made the abode of everlasting spring, for the mind of man could devise nothing more exquisite. Then came Fate and joined the grief for Odur's death to the eternal spring in Freya's eyes.

Beautiful as were both was the girl upon the rock by the Trollhatta. Now she rises, and the shadow of her tall figure falls upon the rushing waters below. A long robe of simple stuff fell about the girlish form from the half-exposed neck to the ancles. Gathered in folds over the breast, it resembled a Grecian tunic but for the girdle that held it in place, which was costly and finely wrought with gold and silver thread. The dress was of delicate color, and the white undergarment of finest linen was gathered in light puffs above the elbow.

CHAPTER III.

But for the solitary, fairy-like apparition of the girl there was far and wide no living creature to be seen. Still there was motion, for the wind had risen, bending back the boughs of the trees and sweeping through the low brushwood that stretched down to the rapids above the falls. But neither the roaring of the wind nor the creaking of the branches could be heard, for the blast of the Trollhatta swallowed up every minor sound.

It drowned, too, the rustling of the thick, yellow leafage in the brushwood above the falls. The wind blew over it in gusts, scurrying through the dead leaves, then all was still again except in one spot where the vibration of the leaves continued, and would not be quieted. There almost seemed to be a quivering asp among the

bushes, except that it appeared to change position constantly, and, curiously enough, to shift obliquely over the hill-side towards the stream.

But it could not have been detected by the keenest ear, and only perchance by an eye intently fixed upon the spot. For a moment it appeared as though the young fairy of the Trollhatta had done so. She turned away from the sun, which had just sunk in a crimson flood below the horizon, and looked backwards up the stream. But the fiery ball had blinded her, and the wind came shivering over Lake Wener, and swept together the brown leaves of the hillside. It brought something else with it, something like the leaf after which she had grasped. It was not a leaf, however, but another of Trollhatta's lovely guests, a child of the mountain solitude, as rarely gifted in its way as the girl. She did seem to have something in common with the beautiful butterfly with its white wings dotted with great, shining spots, and the comparison seemed apt as the rare insect, caught up somewhere by the wind, and vainly struggling against it, now floated by her in the direction of the falls. She followed it a moment with her eye, then like an impulsive, fleet-footed child darted after it down the slope.

Some fifty feet distant, at the place where at this moment the quivering asp seemed to stand, a head peered through the shrubbery, and gazed in wonder at the white form flying in pursuit of the butterfly. Then the wonder in the clever grey eyes gave place to an alarmed expression, whose dictate the muscular arms seemed to obey for the bushes were torn apart with such violence that, in spite of the roar of the falls, it might have been distinctly heard.

But the girl did not hear it, or would not heed it. Every thought was now concentrated in the effort to reach her fair counterpart before the wind had borne it irrevocably into the fine spray which like a veil, enwrapped the rushing fall. Now and then she would reach out her hand to seize the giddy creature, but she may have feared to grasp it too roughly, for the slender fingers were as awkward and irresolute as the feet were firm and sure in gliding down the steep slope of the hillside. Yet the danger was great; the grey eyes, which had advanced within twenty steps, saw it well—it needed but a crumbling stone, a misstep, a stumble, and the girl would fall inevitably into the whirl of the wild water.

In vain! The loud almost angry shout of warning which the young man uttered was drowned in the noise of the cataract, in dangerous proximity to which the girl now stood. Vain, too, her effort to save her imperilled com-

rade who seemed powerless to resist the fatal attraction of Trollhatta. It struggled for a moment against the fine, damp spray which encompassed it, then fell heavy-winged upon the surface of the water just as the outstretched hand of the girl seized it from the shore. But at the same instant, the insufficient grass-tuft upon which she was kneeling gave way, she uttered a faint cry, and grasped vainly with her other hand for support. A mighty wave came on, a white arm seemed reaching eagerly from out Trollhatta to lay hold of the girl's golden hair, and a mocking, exultant laugh to ring from the foaming deep.

The faithless turf sank more and more. "Gustav!" cried the girl, "Gustav!"

"I am here!" The man came on like a wild deer, giving a mad leap over the last knot of shrubbery; he stumbled and fell hard by the perilous shore to the ground, but holding himself with a firm grip of his right hand in the earth he caught the falling girl with his left around the waist, and with a mighty effort drew her back from the embrace of the Trollhatta.

It all happened with the rapidity of thought and the girl, supported by the helpful arm, had sprung lightly to her feet, and now looked with thankful but wondering surprise into the face of her benefactor. She had extended her hand, but now half-hesitatingly drew it back.

The stranger in his turn looked at her in wonder, arising, it was plain to see from her extraordinary beauty. He might have numbered thirty years, and was tall of stature, his features irregular, but sharp-cut, and more expressive than the average Swedish type. His dark hair fell in tangles over his forehead, and his clothing bore marks of his struggle with thorns and briars. He perceived the hesitation expressed in the half-extended hand of the girl, and a passionate, scornful expression played about his mouth.

"Is life so worthless to you that you cannot even offer your hand to him who has preserved it?" he questioned angrily.

The tone was even more offensive than the words themselves. A vivid flush overspread the girl's face, and she drew up her tall figure with maidenly pride, and an equally disdainful reply rose to her lips. But reflecting, doubtless, that however unseemly the expression, there was still truth in the idea conveyed, and that in very deed without the aid of his strong arm, she had not now stood confronting him, she answered mildly,

"I thought you were—"

He took the word abruptly. "I do not merely think that you called me, but I know it. My ears heard as plainly as my eyes saw that but for me you would have shared the fate of the butterfly you so rashly pursued. This you know, and you know further that the custom of our land entitles me to kiss your lips, and my demand is modest when I ask no other reward than this."

At these words, he took her small hand in his strong grasp and kissed it. She had listened to him quietly at first, but soon avoided his gaze, she knew not why. She could none the less refuse him her hand, for he was right in what he demanded, and had he not been, there was that in his manner which brooked no opposition. She had no fear; one who had risked his life for hers, could surely mean no harm. But as she thus passively resigned her hand to him, she looked down timidly at the other, which even in the moment of peril had not relaxed its hold of the butterfly. Cautiously extending its feelers, the insect crept from between the fingers of its benefactress. It appeared to realize what the kind hand had done for it, for it made no effort to escape, but remained seated as fearlessly as upon a white flower, now and then flapping its beautiful wings by way of thanks. The young man, too, looked at it for a moment in silence, then said impetuously, "Do you not know that fools that rush so madly to their own destruction must be let to have their way? You have seen that they otherwise drag their rescuers with them into the pit. Who would have helped me, if I had been a fool like—like you!" he finished hastily with a short, unmelodious laugh.

The girl felt her breath come short and quick, whether from the sudden damp of evening, or from the eccentric manner of the stranger—in this lonely wilderness among the rocks.

"I have no fear of the Trollhatta," she answered gently, "I have known it from childhood and it has never harmed me."

"Trollhatta!" Her strange, unsought companion repeated the word in surprise. "Is that the Trollhatta of which you boast so much? Let us see how savage the renowned monster really is!"

With a quick bound he reached the shelf of rock which projected out into the spray of the cataract and bent recklessly over the chasm. It was now the girl's turn to cry out in alarm. He did not hear it, and was only aware of it by the motion of her lips and the expression of her face as he turned and came back laughing and shaking the spray from hair and brow.

"That revives the hare when the hounds are on his track; your Trollhatta is a brave fellow," he said merrily. "Should you have cared if I

had been dashed over?" indicating the direction carelessly.

The girl looked at him with troubled eyes, and gave no answer; a doubt seemed arising in her mind as to the state of things existing behind the stranger's broad forehead. He went on without stopping for an answer,

"Pooh! You would not even have scrambled down in search of my bones, only the dogs might have scented their trace in the water, and been beaten by their masters for their pains."

He looked up with contracted brows, and suddenly grasped the girl's slender wrist again, so rudely as to cause pain. In this way he drew her in spite of her resistance a few steps up the stream, and said with muffled voice pointing to the water,

"Would a deaf man seeing it here, as it toys with the flowers on its banks, as the evening sun reflects upon its tranquil bosom, and its waves flow past, so clear, so peaceful, so transparent, would he dream, girl, that a swift, treacherous current is rushing beneath, ready to entrap the unsuspecting who trust it, and hurl them into the gaping chasm which awaits them? And yet I tell you, your Trollhatta is but a child's plaything compared with a stream I know, which toys even more gently with flowers, which smiles and beams with sunny light, which embraces you kisses you and strokes your cheek—and they who stand on its banks are blind and deaf, they see not the gulf which yawns before them, they hear not the roaring thunder which will drown their death agony—ha, ha,—think of me, girl, when you hear of this again, it is called—"

He had spoken rapidly, with unnatural gaiety. "What is your name?" he questioned, suddenly recollecting himself.

"Catharine Stenbock."

She spoke it simply, without self-consciousness, though the name she pronounced was one of the noblest of the land. This was apparent by its effect upon the stranger, for he retreated a step in surprise, and said measuring the girl narrowly, but at the same time with a perceptible increase of knightly courtesy,

"By God, the blindness of this land is contagious, or I must have recognized you at first sight, Rose of Trollhatta. Or rather—" and there was something strangely winning in the smile which accompanied his words—"I had fancied you otherwise, Karin, from the songs in praise of your beauty, for the eyes of the singers of our land are dull like its swords. I thank you. You must know I have a strange liking for mad pranks, and it is at least one claim to immortality to have rescued the Rose of Trollhatta."

Karin Stenbock colored slightly, she had done the stranger an injustice in doubting his sanity, as his last words testified. But at the same time she felt she should not listen to them, and yet how could she do otherwise when she considered that she owed him her life. Moreover, there was something in his speech, still more perhaps in his unexpressed thoughts, that attracted her like some mysterious affinity. From the changing expression of his eyes; as from her own, there spoke the grief of Freya for her last lover..

Thus she stood with downcast eyes, in her irresolution more beautiful than ever, A spell of silence enwrapped the only two living beings here among the desolate rocks.

CHAPTER IV.

Twilight gathered, the wind increased and drove up cloud-masses from Lake Wener; but the young man seemed to have forgotten the end and aim of his strange coming, and his eyes gleamed with a new and dreamy light as they rested on Karin's delicate, half-averted profile.

"It is growing dark, I must go home," she said at length. He did not move; she walked a short distance up the stream and turned back, wishing to ask something, but overcome by a shyness quite foreign to her nature.

Suddenly he roused himself, and the old expression returned to his face. To his voice also as he asked abruptly,

"Has Stenbock—has your father gone to Stockholm?"

She shook her sunny head. "He intended to go, but injured his foot, and was not able to mount his horse. I was glad."

"You were glad, girl? Do you begrudge him Christian of Denmark's kiss?"

"One should not accept hospitality from one's enemy. It is not noble—and not wise." she added more slowly.

The stranger approached her quickly. "You pass hard sentence on the nobility of this land. Of one's enemy? Know you that this word might cost you your head? King Christian of Denmark is to-day king of Sweden, he is your master, and if he deign to honor your father's house with his presence, you may play the role of another 'Dove of Amsterdam'."

Karin lifted her head proudly; a burning ray as from some hidden volcanic depths, shot from her eyes over his face. That was her answer.

"But if they should force you?" he pursued quickly.

"Then would I curse you for having rescued me from yonder grave!" Her lips quivered as

she pointed to the water. The stranger's words had opened the flood-gates of a passion whose existence few would suspect in this frail girlish being, but which would rage and boil like the surging waters of Trollhatta.

But controlling herself soon, she continued, "I know not who you are who think thus to intimidate a girl. There are men enough in Sweden still who would shed their blood to avert such shame from the daughters of the land." The question she had been endeavoring to frame was implied in her first words; but he whom it concerned seemed not to heed it. Instead he asked half in scorn,

"You have good courage, Rose of Trollhatta. Do you know such a man? Do you know his name?"

A defiant expression played about Karin's mouth. "And did I know but a single one, one man, being such, has often freed his land from servitude. Yes—" she continued with rising indignation, meeting the young man's searching gaze undauntedly—"if I trusted to no other arm than to that of Gustav Erichson—"

She paused in affright, for her companion broke out into a wild, shrill laugh which echoed from the rocks around. "Do you know Gustav Erichson, Karin Stenbock?" he asked.

Half indignant, half fearful, she shook her head and was silent. After a pause he spoke,

"Look you, this is the idle talk of the people; but I will tell you what your hero is. He runs like a hare from land to land before the Danish dogs; he sees women and children maltreated by Christian's troops, and stops his ear to their cry; he hears the wailing of his people and has no comfort for them but empty curses. He is a cowardly wretch, who, rather than endanger his precious life, crawls at night-time into holes and ditches; a sparrow who swears vengeance on the vulture that has destroyed his nest, but which starts at the clashing of iron, which trembles at the rustle of a dry bough in the forest."

He stopped, and, as if to seek a picture for his last words, looked behind him with attentive gaze. The wind came lashing the clouds before it, and getting the start of them, rattled the branches of the brushwood till they creaked again. Heavy drops of rain began to fall with a pattering sound on the dry foliage. The young man continued in listening attitude for some seconds, then turning to the girl, said rapidly,

"Karin, I must pass the night in your father's house. Forgive my hasty words. You seem to think well of Gustav Erichson; it was not ill-meant, my anger was aroused not at himself, but at his fate and at his nation."

"I do not know him, that is, I have never be-

held him with my eyes," she answered simply, "but I believe, nevertheless, that I judge him more fairly than you do."

"You think it, girl? I too have never seen him with my eyes, there was always some unconquerable obstacle in the way, and this, I almost fear will follow me as long as I live. But I have heard him—heard of him, I would say—often, and you may be right. Continue to uphold him, Rose of Trollhatta. The hour may once come when he can requite you for it, and, upon my soul, as I know Gustav Erichson, he would be capable of wresting the Swedish crown from Christian of Denmark, merely to lay it at the feet of Karin Stenbock, in gratitude for never doubting him, even when, in despair, he gave himself over to the mercy of the hounds. And because you have thus spoken of him, I have asked shelter of you for the night, for I, too, am pursued and hunted down by the Danish dogs, and whatever kindness you show me, you show to one who hates the enemies of your land no less than does Gustav Vasa."

He spoke with grace and high-born pride, and Karin reached him her hand impulsively.

"Come!" she said, "though you may not choose to disclose your name, if you are Denmark's foe, be welcome to the home of Gustav Stenbock."

The stranger looked at her amazed.

"Have these perilous times taught you no caution, Karin?" he asked. "Do you know who I am? What if I were one of Christian's spies, to bring ruin upon you and yours? You know, too, the Dane-king's warning against sheltering those under the ban of exile. What matters it, at best, if one more nameless fugitive perish compared with the weal or woe of your whole house? I thank you for your good-will, Karin, but I have slept many nights under the open sky, and do not fear another. So farewell—"

"You may know Gustav Erichson better than I, but you know Gustav Stenbock poorly if you fancy he would be deterred by fear from offering shelter to a friend of Sweden," Karin interposed earnestly. "As to what you said before, I think no nation ever regained its freedom by distrust, and that—"

She paused a moment hesitatingly, and looked full into his face.

"What, Karin?"

"That if your eyes could deceive, Sweden's liberty is not lost," she concluded simply, and it was not hard to see what glad light her words called into her listener's eyes. He followed her now, without further mention of the test to which he had put her, up the same eminence from whence she had watched the setting sun.

The western sky was still blue, and the horizon was marked by a belt of lurid gold radiating like northern lights towards the zenith. A heavy bank of clouds was massed in the east, and upon it flashes of flickering bluish light came and went. It was a rare phenomenon for the season. The rocky hill-side which the two had climbed, though not high, was steep, and they stopped a moment at the summit to regain breath. The stranger glanced about him. At the south, east and west, he could look far out into the dusky land; only at the north the higher mountains of the Trollhatta shut out the view.

"The storm comes from the direction of Stockholm," he muttered between his teeth, "I knew it beforehand, these last days have been too bright." "That is the past, yonder lies Sweden's future," said the girl confidently, pointing to the golden glow in the west. He smiled bitterly. "But it sinks before us, and our day is over ere it returns."

Then his eye flashed angrily, and he stamped upon the ground. "Cursed be everybody who thinks thus," he cried vehemently, "Everyone who does not risk all for the freedom of this land! Cursed be your beauty, Rose of Trollhatta if you use it for aught else than as a reward for the liberator of your country!"

CHAPTER V.

A prolonged peal of thunder accompanied these passionate words. Karin walked rapidly down the opposite slope, brow and cheek suffused with bright color. Her heart beat loudly and her hand trembled till the butterfly, which was resting upon it with folded wings, extended its feelers uneasily. Heavy drops fell about them, before them in the dim light rose a thick cluster of trees, lindens already despoiled of their leaves, and high-branched elms still covered with dark foliage. Beyond them appeared the roof of an ancient, castle-like building.

"Is that Torpa?" inquired the stranger. Karin nodded assent.

"And is your mother, Brita Stenbock, at home?"

She again assented, raising her eyes wonderingly to his. "You appear to know us, and methinks it were fair for me to say the same of you, before I commend you to my father's protection."

"You are right, Karin. It was folly in me to withhold my insignificant name so long," he answered quickly. "It is Gustav Folkung, and if you will grant me one favor more, let it be

this—not to conduct me to your parents, and to tell no one of our meeting. The men will by this time have finished their work in the court, let me slip unnoticed into a stall, and find a bed in the hay.”

She repeated the name “Gustav Folkung,” and added musingly, “I have heard of you, you are a friend to Sweden. Strange that all of that name are so. No—” as if the train of thought almost startled her—“No,” she repeated, but in a different tone, and turning to her companion. “You must not spend the night thus. You are weary, and in need of a comfortable resting-place. We have other provision for an exile, and there is no one but my mother in the house.”

“You are right, Rose, I am weary. The pursuers have been hard upon me these last days, and sleep will indeed be welcome,” murmured Folkung more to himself than to his guide. “I do not mistrust your people, Karin,” he continued, “but a secret is safer in one hand than in two. You can not lie girl, swear to me that you will on no account betray my hiding-place, and I will follow whither you lead me. For it is as you say: I am weary, very weary. Tomorrow, before the day breaks, I shall be gone.”

“I know not what reasons you may have,” answered Karin, “but I am in duty bound to respect your request, for you have saved my life, and are an enemy of our enemies. I swear that I will betray your hiding place to no one. Come!”

They had entered the deep shadow of the elms, she seized his hand and drew him after her. The rain now fell in torrents upon the trees, and drowned the noise of their footsteps. Karin, lost in thought, proceeded in silence. “It is the only safe way,” she murmured at last, though not so low but that her companion overheard and inquired its meaning. She replied hurriedly that there was but one room in the house, which was never entered at night, and she would conduct him hither. The castle, which they had already seen in the distance, now rose close before them. It was enshrouded in darkness except for a glimmer of light from the ground-floor, and from one upper apartment. The former issued from a room close to the main entrance, and the hardy faces of men and maids were visible within, moving about the flickering oil-lamp.

Avoiding the open door, Karin drew her companion aside, apparently through a garden at the back of the castle. The east wind howled more fiercely here, and beat the heavy drops with angry might against the solid masonry. Notwith-

standing, their approach was detected by the sharp ears of a huge mastiff, which growled angrily until Karin called in a low, commanding voice. The dog thereupon sprang with a joyous whine toward them, but growled again upon scenting the presence of a stranger.

“Still Bjorn, it is a Swede not a Dane!” said the girl, and the dog gave another low whine and crouched contentedly at his mistress’ side. The latter felt along the wall and shoved back a bolt. They entered through a small door, which she again barred from within, then led her charge up a flight of stairs, and through narrow passages till another door was reached. Drawing a key from her pocket, Karin unlocked it and threw it open. A different atmosphere greeted Folkung, the gloom seemed laden with a something that, setting November at defiance encircled the weary wanderer like a breath of flowers,—warm, yet fresh and incense-breathing as a summer morning. But he had scarcely crossed the threshold when his guide released her hold of his hand, and whispered hastily:

“I dare not bring you light, it would betray you. You must be as noiseless as possible for my mother’s sitting-room adjoins this. She is extremely acute of hearing, and one of the serving-women might beside be present. My father is absent at the house of a friend, and will not return before the morrow. As soon as I can do so unnoticed, I will bring you food. Fasten the inner bolt, and do not open till some one taps on the door and says Gustav Vasa. And then—yonder by the window stands a bench—”

She hesitated a moment—“no,” correcting herself hastily, “you are exhausted, here to the left is a bed, throw yourself upon it and rest; only—only perhaps you would draw off your shoes.”

CHAPTER VI.

The last request was somewhat confused and disconnected, but before Falkung could reflect upon its meaning, he heard the door close.

“Do not forget the bolt,” came again in a low whisper. But instead of obeying, he flung open the door and peered into the dark after the girl. “Karin,” he cried in a muffled voice, but there was no answer, only the wind came whistling up the dark passage, for the window of the room stood open. The cool air brought him to his senses, he closed the door and fastened the bolt then stepped to the window, which was distinguishable from the surrounding darkness by a dull, gray shimmer. Letting the rain beat into his face, he looked out.

The ground was no longer visible, but he computed from the number of steps he had ascended that it must lay far beneath him. He heard the playful yelping of the dog from below as it grew faint and fainter, and finally died away towards the front of the house, marking plainly the whereabouts of the girl as she retraced the way they had come.

"Gustav Vasa," he murmured, "the Rose of Trollhätta says that Gustav Vasa is the watchword. She should rather have said that Gustav Erichson is a fool, since he has felt the hand of a girl in his."

He stepped noiselessly back from the window feeling his way along the walls of the room. They afforded solid protection against wind and weather. High carved clothes-presses stood in the corners, then more wall. No, now his hand struck against wood, smoothly planed like that of a door. A ray of light fell through a narrow chink, and at the same moment, the sound of a well-known voice greeted his listening ear.

"Good evening, mother," said Karin. "You have tarried long, Karin; the twilight must be falling."

The speaker's sight must not alone be failing her, she must be totally blind. "It is night, mother," answered the girl, "and stormy. I was at the Trollhätta, and saved the life of the last butterfly. You know the one with red stars which flutters about the Kinnakulle. He tried to cross the falls and fell in; so I rescued him, and since then he sits tamely on my hand. He has not thanked me in words, but I feel he knows what he owes me and is grateful. If it were in his power he would risk his life again for me. Come, you foolish thing, light on the flowers yonder."

Gustav Folkung heard each word. Karin's graceful expression of thanks, thus lightly addressed to the butterfly, moved him strangely, and he felt, in spite of his weariness, rivetted to the spot.

He heard how the elder woman sighed as she answered,

"You are a child, and toy with butterflies. It were better had you left it to its fate. My eyes warn me that evil days are in store for Sweden, and many shall be swept away who till now have escaped. Read to me, Karin, from the book whose stories were your delight as a child. Open at the twelfth page, and read of the singer whose harp extolled the heroic deeds of his ancestors, but was mute of those of his children's children. He was blind, and sat by the Trollhätta. So he dashed his harp in pieces on the rocks and sprang into the flood."

The listener heard the girl move through the

room. He felt his way noiselessly back to the window, but in the darkness struck against some small object on a table. It rolled off and fell with a crash to the floor. Without stopping, he flung himself quickly upon the bed indicated by his guide. The voice of the elder woman was now heard in the next room, interrupting the reading which had already begun.

"Is Björn in your room, Karin? I heard something fall. Let Ingeborg take a light and see."

The maid in question who had been quietly sitting in a corner rose and took up a candle. But Karin sprang up, saying quietly,

"Stay! Björn is without. My window is open and the storm beats in; I need no light."

She opened the door and left it ajar while she walked with a firm step to the offending window and closed it noisily. The light from a massive metal lamp of artistic workmanship shone into the room, and Folkung could look directly into the face of the mother, who was seated in an armchair by the table, gazing fixedly into vacancy. She had the same high, finely rounded brow as the daughter, except that it was deeply furrowed and shaded by thick, almost white hair. But her arms, uncovered according to the custom of the day almost to the elbow, were still full and white. She must have been younger than she looked, and when she rose, be a proud and imposing figure. Folkung could not withdraw his eyes from her, and murmured, "You have grown old Brita Stenbock. You were a beautiful woman when I climbed upon your knees in Sten Sture's house, and pulled at the golden chain about your neck."

He was silent, and, impelled by an irresistible attraction, turned towards Karin. Her dress brushed past him, he could not restrain himself and stretched out his hand to hold her back. He whispered her name, and pressed the hem of her garment to his lips. Freeing herself with a quick, decided movement, she said in a jesting tone as she re-entered the sitting-room,

"The storm will play no more such pranks. Be sensible, storm, and compose yourself to rest."

Threatening playfully with her finger, she closed the door. The mother raised her head and said,

"You are childish tonight, Karin."

"The storm and myself made each other's acquaintance some time ago," she replied lightly, "he is insolent and unruly, but when I lay my hand upon him, he becomes tame and quiet."

The mother shrugged her shoulders. "You have been chattering with the gnomes at the Trollhätta again, and talk childish nonsense.

Read on. The storm, however, does not appear to do your bidding, for I feel the wind increasing around my shoulders. I would your father were at home tonight, or at least Gustav—"

Overcome by fatigue, Folkung heard no more. He lay in a half slumber with stormy thoughts surging through his brain, till, suddenly, at the touch of Karin Stenbock's hand, they subsided and went to rest.

CHAPTER VII.

The wind whistled outside, and Björn protested against it at intervals in a long-drawn howl. In his dreams, the sleeper pressed the soft cushion against his cheek and repeated the mother's words, "Is Björn in your room, Karin?"

A shudder seized the dreamer.—"Your room, Karin?" he repeated, drawing a deep breath.

Suddenly he started up and stared about him. The darkness which had surrounded him had given place to a bright illumination. At least the light appeared at the first moment intense and dazzling; then he perceived that the moon which had penetrated the clouds was streaming into the room. But it was not the light that had awakened him, it was a sound, or combination of sounds, that fell upon his ear. A noise like rumbling thunder came on from the distance, drew nearer, continued to increase, then stopped abruptly. The secret guest at Torpa Castle listened intently. Instead of the rumbling, he heard outside the whinnying of horses and the heavy tread of men ascending the steps.

The door of the large apartment where sat the two female members of the Stenbock family flew open, and a man with broad shoulders and knightly bearing crossed the threshold. The gray hair blown back by the storm revealed the man's bare, bony forehead, and his lips worked violently, partly from excitement, partly from pain caused by his rapid walk, which gave him no time to support his limping left leg with his sword.

His cloak fell from his left shoulder, behind which appeared the blonde head of a young man whose eyes anxiously sought Karin.

"Father!" cried she, springing up from her seat. Something not unlike disagreeable surprise was conveyed in her tone, but another look at the new-comers changed it to real alarm. "What has happened to you, father?"

"To me?" Gustav Stenbock grasped at his throat as if to remove some obstacle, and attempted to speak. But he could only gasp, no sound came.

"For God's sake, Gustav, what has happened?"

repeated Karin addressing herself to the young man who had flown to meet her.

He, too, was breathless, his clothing was drenched with rain, and his high riding-boots were covered to the knee with a stiff crust of mud and clay. He might have been two years older than Karin; it was plain to see that the clouded expression of the blue eyes and open features just at present was not natural to them. And his hands, too, trembled with excitement, while his knees shook with over-exertion and exhaustion.

A moment's pause during which no-one spoke succeeded, and was broken by the voice of the mistress of the house. She had risen with the aid of the table, and asked with a forward inclination of the head,

"Who came with Stenbock? Is it Gustav Rosen?"

"Yes, mother," answered Karin, who had lain her head upon his breast, and thrown her arms about his neck while he kissed her brow and eyes with passionate vehemence.

"You live, yes, you live," he murmured brokenly.

Stenbock had thrown aside his dripping outer garments, and now, motioning almost angrily to the youth, said,

"Speak, Rosen. Tell it to them, as you did to me, without flinching."

Gustav Rosen released himself gently from Karin's embrace, and advanced towards Brita Stenbock.

"Be seated, aunt," he said, leading her by the hand back to her chair, "I bring you greeting from Christian of Denmark."

His words, spoken with peculiar emphasis, were followed by a silence that seemed to fill the room. The door through which the two had entered, stood open and the men who had followed their master up the steps, peered in with curious looks. But all was still as death, only Björn howled sullenly out into the night. Then Brita Stenbock asked in sharp accents,

"Gustav Rosen, you desire to ally yourself with the house of Stenbock. Why do you delay? Sweden's women have become men, since Sweden's men are like women. What message do you bring from Christian of Denmark? His hand-grasp is treason, and his greeting death."

"You have spoken rightly, Brita," returned the youth. He took Karin's hand and clasped it convulsively in his. "I rode out of Stockholm last evening," he pursued, "I met your father at Lake Wener, on his way to the place from whence I came—"

The white-haired woman sprang again to her feet.

"You would have deceived us, Stenbock, you would have gone to Stockholm?" she questioned in a hard voice.

With a muttered curse Gustav Stenbock flung his sword to the ground. The young man interposed quickly,

"I counselled him to it, the entire nobility had obeyed the king's summons, and I feared he would suffer if he refused—"

"The entire nobility of Sweden is false and cowardly," broke out the blind woman angrily.

"Brita Stenbock, you are unjust and will repent of your words," replied the youth in a hollow voice. "Those of whom you speak are deaf to praise or blame. Since last evening there exists no longer a nobility in this land. The Malar is red with its blood—he who drank with the Danish king in Stockholm, paid for the banquet with his head. Christian of Denmark has beheaded Sweden's entire nobility!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Who uttered that? A shrill piercing laugh came from one corner of the room, and the speaker involuntarily turned to seek it. Karin also glanced in that direction, her hand trembled in her lover's hold, and a sudden pallor overspread her face.

Whose cheek was not blanched as they listened to Gustav Rosen's last words, Stenbock likewise cast a searching look at the occupants of the room, at the group of servants who, according to ancient Swedish custom, had collected in the dwelling-room.

"Is there a Danish traitor among us? Who laughs at Sweden's downfall?" he asked, contracting his bushy brows ominously.

No one answered but Karin, who said, "It sounded like laughter, father, but it was only the wind."

Rosen glanced towards the door leading into Karin's room. "Methinks it came from there.—What is wrong, Ingeborg?" addressing the maid who had also anxiously fixed her eyes on the door.

"There was a suspicious noise within before you came, Sir, but the young mistress was courageous and went in."

The youth drew his sword and advanced a step towards the door, but Karin placed herself quickly before it.

"Ingeborg is a timid fool, who believes in ghosts," she said, laying a detaining hand upon his arm, "believe me, it was the wind—"

At this she gently drew him back. Brita Stenbock, who had sunk back into her chair with

her face buried in her hands, had heard nothing of this by-play. She now rose with a face pallid as marble, and asked with steady voice,

"Who were beheaded, Gustav Rosen? Tell me the names."

The young man turned, and replaced his sword in its sheath; he was evidently accustomed to obey the voice of the aged woman.

"Ask who escaped, aunt, and they are easy to name," he returned, "for they are present in this room, your husband and—myself," he concluded with momentary hesitation.

Brita Stenbock's lips worked strangely, "You were also in Stockholm, Rosen; how comes it that you did not share the fate of the Swedish nobles?"

"I escaped by a fortunate chance," replied the youth in a low, confused voice. He turned away his head to avoid a hasty, anxious look from Karin, so different from her wont. The mistress of the house repeated his last words under her breath.

"By a fortunate chance. Happy are you, Karin, but for that Gustav Rosen's head had lain with those of the brave Swedish nobles."

The cloud of doubt and anger disappeared from the girl's eyes. She laid her trembling head trustingly on her lover's breast. Brita Stenbock continued,

"Is there no one left in whom Sweden can place her hope but Stenbock and yourself?"

The tone in which the last words were added was too unmistakeable to be longer ignored. Stenbock, who had till now stood by in silent abstraction, looked up angrily and said,

"Methinks, Brita, that today is not the time to revive an old wrong. You speak madly, woman. Has Gustav Rosen injured you by saving my life? Has he done a favor to Christian of Denmark by hindering him from placing my head with the others?"

"Mother!" exclaimed Karin also with proud displeasure. But the latter continued without change of voice or manner,

"I asked you, Rosen, if no one else escaped the massacre?"

The youth must have a powerful incentive for controlling his temper, and that was, doubtless, the fair girl around whom he threw his arm, for he replied more calmly than the rest had spoken,

"I believe that Gustav Erichson is the only one who escaped, or rather, who did not go to Stockholm. The fox scented the trap—"

"Speak with respect of Gustav Vasa, boy!" thundered his aunt. Rosen was silent. But her sudden wrath soon subsided. "Gustav Erichson," she said slowly, "he was a child when he taught me first what becomes a Swedish

woman. As long as he lives, nothing is lost—all, perhaps, is won," she added softly as to herself.

She opened her eyes and fixed their sightless balls in the direction of the youth's voice.

"I would not wound you, Gustav Rosen," she continued, "you have been a boy till today, but now the hour has come to prove whether the blood of your father or the Danish blood of your mother flows in your veins."

Karin looked joyfully at her lover.

"Gustav has as true a Swedish heart, mother as you or I, as our father or Gustav Vasa," she said. "But it is late, you should rest and reflect tomorrow what is to be done."

Stenbock shook his head. "Tomorrow may be too late, Christian is swift as the plague." Rosen likewise assented. "I know that a decree has been issued to glean the whole land, wherever one of those whose name stands in the list furnished by the barber's apprentice, Slaghök, escaped death. Archbishop Trolle, incited by Slaghök, has forced the decree into execution."

"God's curse upon the traitor—" Brita Stenbock's passionate outcry was drowned by the furious yelping of Björn, who was heard springing with rapid bounds up the stairs.

"All the temporal counsellors of the kingdom, two bishops, the burgomaster and the aldermen of Stockholm were beheaded," pursued Rosen feverishly. "The gates were suddenly closed, and the streets occupied by Danish soldiers, who had landed secretly during the night. Whoever was present at the execution, and uttered a word of pity, was immediately seized by the executioners and brutally butchered. Archbishop Trolle implored the king upon his knees to have the papal ban against the prisoners executed by death."

CHAPTER IX.

Sounds of angry altercation and the clash of arms rose from below, interrupting the speaker. Björn came with a mighty bound through the open door, and sprang with head erect and glittering eyes towards Karin. He was closely followed by one of the men, who cried,

"Hide, master! The Danes are in pursuit—they are already in the house. We can not hold them back."

Stenbock erected his powerful frame, rested his hand on his sword hilt, and answered in a firm, clear voice,

"Why should I fly from my own house? I am conscious of no crime."

At the same instant, the door, which the man

had closed in his fright, was thrown open, and a Danish officer entered with drawn sword, followed by a troop of soldiers armed with halberds. The interval between the first announcement of their coming and their actual appearance had been so short, that, save the master of the house, none of the occupants of the room had regained their composure from the unexpected shock. Brita Stenbock's lifeless eyes glowed with supernatural light as she turned them full of deadly hatred toward the door; Karin's heart beat audibly, and she eyed the door leading into her room with feverish suspense, whilst Gustav Rosen stepped hastily into the shadow of the window and looked out with flushed face into the night. Ingeborg, the maid, sat moaning in a corner, her face covered with her hands. Only Björn kept his glittering eyes fixed upon the intruders, and, occasionally, snuffed the air critically through the crack at the threshold.

The Danish captain, after sending a searching glance through the room, advanced upon Stenbock, standing silent and erect, and asked shortly,

"Gustav Stenbock, I believe?"

Stenbock assented without change of position.

"His Majesty, King Christian II. of Sweden, makes known to you his regret that you failed to present yourself, in response to his invitation, at his residence city of Stockholm. But he will overlook the insult thus personally offered him, as well as your refusal to comply with the wish of your sovereign, and is pleased to assign you no heavier punishment than to forbid you on pain of death to leave your own territory, until he himself grant the permission. On pain of death, Gustav Stenbock. My errand is performed."

Stenbock's chest heaved convulsively.

"No one has a right to hold a Swedish nobleman imprisoned, unless authorized by the council of state," he answered in a steady voice.

The captain turned away indifferently, and directed his attention to the group of servants, from whose midst an angry murmur had greeted his last words.

"It is the will of His Majesty that the slightest opposition to his wishes be punished with instant death. Lead him who murmured with chains, and lead him to Stockholm!" he commanded.

The soldiers seized the luckless offender, whom none of his comrades ventured to aid. Stenbock tightened his grasp of his sword. The officer perceiving it, continued,

"His Majesty will rejoice, Gustav Stenbock, to find in you a faithful and obedient servant.

He is likewise assured that you will refuse shelter to all traitorous fugitives upon whose heads a price is fixed, and who scour the land stirring up rebellion. But my directions are implicit to search every house in this vicinity, and I regret, even at this late hour, to subject you to this inconvenience." Then turning to his soldiers, "Begin with the nearest room, with that one."

But Stenbock's power of endurance was exhausted. Disregarding his injured limb, he advanced in front of the approaching mercenaries, and threw himself with drawn sword between them and the door.

"Tell Christian of Denmark," he cried, "that he may well repent not being able to add my head to those of the remaining Swedish nobility! He was master in his castle, I am in mine. I bid him as a guest to Torpa, only regretting that he does not now stand here in lieu of his menial that I might requite his Stockholm hospitality."

The words were spoken with bitter irony, and accompanied by so sounding a swing of his broad blade through the air that the nearest soldiers retreated in alarm, and gazed irresolutely on the herculean form of the old man. Dark veinsswelled up on the forehead of the Danish officer, and he frowned menacingly. Beckoning to the halberdiers behind him, who lowered their arms, he said,

"Gustav Stenbock, if I were to enforce my authority, your life is forfeited. In the name of King Christian of Sweden, make room!"

The halberdiers advanced with unbroken front, but Stenbock did not stir. He fixed his eyes unflinchingly on the fast approaching blades then threw his arm with a look of proud satisfaction around the neck of his daughter, who had flown towards him and placed herself fearlessly at his side, crying, "I will stand by you, my father!"

But the deadly steels did not halt. They were inured to blood, and it was, doubtless, not the first time they had been pointed at the breast of a defenceless girl during the savage struggle for mastery waged by the Dane-king against Sweden. Unmoved by her beauty and helplessness, they advanced; not a lash quivered on their leader's cold eye; the seconds may be counted ere the flashing spears must reach the door, and that which stands between it and them be dashed to earth.

CHAPTER X.

But there was yet another and till now silent spectator of the scene. Not the mistress of the

house, she continued passively seated at her table, as if transported in spirit to some far-off region of thought. But he who had watched the progress of affairs with rising disquietude was Gustav Rosen. His confusion at the entrance of the Danes had been unmistakable, as was his attempt to withdraw attention from himself. He had listened in silence but with flushed face to the dialogue between Stenbock and the officer, then his whole frame shook with emotion as he perceived Karin's rapid advance to her father's side. He knew the character of the men too well to hope that they would desist from their purpose—the death-bringing halberds measured off the narrow interval of space yet remaining, step by step, they were now but a few feet removed from the breast of the fearless, immovable girl.

"Halt!" cried Gustav Rosen and threw himself between the latter and the soldiers, who stopped, startled at the sudden apparition. The captain stepped forward, and asked gruffly,

"What is the meaning of this? Who are you?"

The youth gave his name, adding a few words of Danish in an undertone, upon which the officer hastily lowered his arms. Withdrawing his head-covering, and giving his soldiers a rapid sign to shoulder their halberds and retreat, he said respectfully,

"I ask your pardon, I was not aware of your presence. I pray you to entreat His Majesty in my behalf—"

Rosen interrupted him hastily, "The young lady is my affianced wife, and the room in question her sleeping apartment. You will readily see this forced her father out of his control; my word of honor need scarce be given that no one is concealed in the room."

The captain's face assumed an embarrassed expression. "Pardon me, Sir," he stammered, "but my orders—"

Gustav Rosen's brow contracted, and he clenched his sword. But quickly recovering himself, he returned,

"You are right, your demand must be complied with. Still you will admit that I have a claim in this matter, and this I shall enforce regardless of consequences. You will be content if in *this* room I take upon myself the execution of the order."

The young man spoke with unaccustomed energy, and in so commanding a tone, that the officer, by an inclination of the head, signified his approval. Stepping back a few paces, he gave instructions to his men to search the remaining rooms of the castle. His demeanor showed that he feared having gone too far in his opposition to the young nobleman, and he endeavored to

repair his error by a studious disregard of all that passed during the subsequent examination of Karin's room. Stenbock seemed conscious of the danger to which he had thus recklessly exposed himself and his loved ones, for he now withdrew silently to one side, leaving the door free for Rosen to lift the latch.

"Forgive me, Karin," said the latter, turning back once more with a smile, "you know—"

But his eyes sought her vainly. Karin no longer stood by his side, was indeed no longer present in the room. In the confusion caused by Rosen's sudden appearance among the Danish soldiers, she had, unnoticed by all, gained the door leading into the corridor, and slipped out into the dark. Turning to the right, she hastened breathlessly through a number of obscure passage-ways, till she arrived at the door through which she had conducted Gustav Folkung into her room. Forgetting that he had barred it at her direction, she shook it violently; then, recollecting, rapped and softly pronounced the watchword, "Gustav Vasa!"

The door instantly flew open, and the fugitive stood before her, clearly outlined in the moonlight which now shone brightly into the room.

"You gave me your word, and Gustav Vasa awaited your coming, Karin," he whispered.

"Quick! Come! she said, not heeding his words. She stepped hastily to the window, the garden below glittered with halberds. Karin uttered a low cry of terror, Folkung had followed and thrown his arm about her.

"If they had not been there, you would not have found me still here," he whispered again, bending so close that his lips brushed her ear.

She seized his hand and dragged him after her out into the dark corridor, just as the door on the opposite side of the room was opened and Björn bounded in. Gustav Rosen stood upon the threshold, and, as if to avoid all suspicion of neglecting the proper forms, called for a light which Ingeborg, still trembling, handed him.

"Do not go alone, Sir, take some of the men with you, there is danger," she implored timidly:

But a happy smile rested on the youth's face. "You are right, it is dangerous here, Ingeborg," he answered with sparkling eyes.

No one in the next room appeared to notice his movements. The maid drew back fearfully, the heavy tread of the Danish hirelings died away in the corridors, as, in obedience to the command of their leader, and provided by the servants of the house with torches, they dispersed through the castle. Gustav Rosen moved forward, shielding the flickering flame with his hand, and looked cautiously about him. But it was plain to see that his zeal did not spring from

a sense of assumed duty, but from a certain, secret, palpitating emotion of the heart.

Suddenly he stopped spell-bound. His eye rested upon Björn, who, half-erected by the side of Karin's bed, was eagerly scenting it. The silken cushions hung down half-way to the floor, the bed was tumbled and disordered as from a heavy pressure, and the linen at the foot, usually so spotless, was soiled with mud and damp clay.

The youth wiped the cold drops from his brow. For a moment everything swam before him, his heart ceased to beat, and he stared vacantly as one bereft of reason. What Ingeborg had said, the shrill laughter that he had himself heard, Karin's words, "Believe me, it is the wind," her arm gently holding him back, her mysterious disappearance—all crowded with feverish haste upon his mind. Then his eyes sank, and he mechanically approached the light to the floor.

Damp imprints of heavy nailed boots crossed and re-crossed each other; they came from the further door and returned thither. Björn, snuffing them, now sprang eagerly towards the door. The fugitives in their haste had not closed it firmly. It flew open, and the dog darted swiftly down the passage. Gustav Rosen followed madly with drawn sword in hand. His hair fell about his hot face and expressionless eyes; he was alone in the long passage-way, but overhead and about him he heard the steps of the Danes, and maddened and confused by nameless, conflicting thoughts, he gasped, "This way! This way!"

CHAPTER XI.

Karin had drawn her charge down the same steps he had before ascended; but instead of opening the side door leading into the garden, she felt along the wall in search of another.

"You must not go into the garden, the whole house is surrounded," she whispered, "descend twelve steps from here, count them, then turn to the left, and a subterranean passage, high enough to enable you to walk upright in it, leads directly to the Trollhätta, near the spot where you found me to-day. The opening is concealed by bushes and a stone which you must roll aside. Hasten, I hear them coming! The God of Sweden be with you!"

The heavy hinges of the door grated in the darkness as the girl tore it open with her strong arm. "Hasten!" she repeated breathlessly, anxiously drawing away her hand from the grasp of her unseen companion.

"You know not what you ask, Karin," he said

passionately. "What matters it to me or to Sweden if they find me here and lay me dead at your feet? What would it matter to you? Then might I kiss your feet in death—"

A ray of light shot down the stairs. "You are mad," gasped Karin and sought with both her trembling hands to force him through the rescuing door. But her strength was but a child's compared with his. He clasped her in his arms and murmured,

"Give me a kiss, Karin, and I will save myself and save Sweden. I will not demand a second till my promise is fulfilled. But if you deny it to me, I remain and deliver myself up to the Danes, and you are my murderer!"

The girl struggled desperately, then suddenly cried, "Björn! Help, Björn!" The dog appeared wagging his bushy tail, but it was too late, even had he known what he was to avert, for the hunted oppressor had reached the lips of Björn's mistress, and pressed his own with fiery vehemence upon them. With a cry of mingled anger and fear, Karin tore herself from his embrace, light flashed upon them, and Rosen stood looking at them from the upper step of the short staircase.

"Thank God!" cried Karin, "it is my betrothed." A double sense of joy was expressed in the words, both for herself and for her charge, against whom she was forced to seek defence. But the phrase had a far different effect upon the latter. For a moment he staggered back against the wall, then sprang with tiger-like fierceness upon her, and seizing her by the shoulder, cried,

"You are betrothed to another, Karin Stenbock?"

His words were accompanied by the same shrill, piercing laugh, which had before interrupted Rosen's narration. At the sound of his voice, the latter had sprung down the stairs pale as death, the light of the candle which he held in his trembling hand fell full in Folkung's face.

"Gustav—" cried the youth. He had lifted his sword irresolutely as if to dash it upon Folkung's head, but Karin arrested his arm, and before he could finish his exclamation, the hand of the fugitive was laid quick as thought upon his lips.

"You are of the dead, Gustav Rosen, if you utter my name," he said so imperatively that the youth shrank from the gaze of his flaming eyes. "You have brought me good tidings, the reaper must first have come with bloody scythe to root out the weeds, before the seed of the future could be sown. Forget not what Gustav

Folkung has told you! Farewell Rose of Trollhätta, I will keep my word."

Rosen looked up in amazement, the speaker had vanished, only the grating of the iron-mounted door as it swung back into place betrayed the road he had taken. Loud steps were heard approaching through the passage; Karin took the light from the trembling hand of her lover, who, fixing his glazed blue eyes upon her, leaned against the wall for support. A single tear rolled slowly from beneath his lashes over his cheek.

"It was well that you came, my Gustav," she said gratefully. He looked at her with distorted features, and repeated, "It was well—oh, Karin, had I never come, had I never come!"

She did not understand him, and took his hand in hers. The Danish captain followed by his men appeared at the head of the steps. "You called, Sir?" he asked civilly.

"It was nothing. Björn scented a wolf prowling around the house," answered the youth pointing to the dog which snarled again at sight of the soldiers.

"I have also discovered nothing," rejoined the officer. He was about leaving when he turned and added with a courteous inclination,

"I beg you to intercede with the lady in my behalf. I would assuredly not have presumed to suspect anything concerning the room of your betrothed. But you know, Sir, duty—"

"I know, and I should not have prevented you from exercising your duty in person," interrupted the young man bitterly, "pardon me, captain, I give you my word, if the case should be repeated, to act differently. But, on the other hand, you might have been content to spare me this task, Did I not give you my word of honor that no one was concealed in the room of my betrothed?"

Gustav Rosen laughed aloud at these words. The officer regarded him wonderingly, then withdrew with a parting salute. Karin walked silently by her lover's side through the corridor. From time to time she cast a questioning glance at his face, as though expecting him to speak.

"You are strange to-night, Gustav," she said at length.

"Strange?" he repeated standing still. "Not I, the world is strange. Give me your hand."

The girl did as she was bid; he pressed the little hand in his, and looked down at it till the tears started to his eyes.

"Two days ago I saw how King Christian offered his hand to his guests," he continued slowly, "and his hand was as quiet and cool as

this one. And then he embraced and kissed them—"The youth threw his arms passionately around the girl's neck and kissed the lips she so willingly proffered.—"No, not the world, the heart is strange," he added softly, "for it will not believe what the eyes see and the ears hear; it believes only what it hopes."

And again he encircled Karin's golden hair with his arm, and held her as he walked, convulsively to his breast.

CHAPTER XII.

And now the land lies dead and silent from the Baltic up to the eternally barren slopes of the North. As far as the eye ranges from the summit of the Kinnakulle, the land is enveloped in a snowy shroud, and the ice holds the restless rushing mountain streams fast in its frigid embrace. Mayhap there is a hidden streamlet murmuring and gurgling in the depths, but no one sees, no one hears. Winter reigns, and a Swedish winter is long. Many still living will not survive the returning Spring.

The land lies in bondage,—all save the Trollhätta. That bows to no foreign yoke, be it that of winter or Christian of Denmark. It dashes unceasingly into the depths, as if to rouse torpid nature with its thundering call. The icicles, which gather like spears on its sides and strive to span it with crystal arch, are shattered unsparingly and borne away on its breast.

Throughout the whole broad land there is but one man who may be likened to the Trollhätta. His name is Gustav Erichson; from the bundle of twigs on his coat of arms, called in Swedish Vase, the people have named him Gustav Vasa. He is the son of a Swedish imperial counsellor, and grandnephew of Sten Sture the Elder, the Regent.

When Christian of Denmark promised to negotiate for peace with Sten Sture at Stockholm he demanded as security for his safety in that city, the persons of six Swedish generals of noble birth, among them Gustav Vasa. The Regent complied in good faith, but the hostages once in possession of the Danish king, the latter refused to come to Stockholm, and Gustav Vasa was his prisoner in Denmark.

A year was thus passed by Vasa in the stronghold of Kallö in northern Jutland. He heard daily of extensive preparations which were being made throughout Denmark to overthrow Sweden. No one in Jutland doubted the immediate execution of the plan. Sweden stood, by reason of the disagreements with the rebellious Archbishop, under papal ban, and Christian's

troops threw dice at their carousals for Swedish lands and maidens.

A chronicle narrates, "that Gustav Erichson was by the like outrages transported to such an excess of rage and fear that he could neither enjoy food nor drink, had he been better cared for in this respect than was the case. Therefore his sleep was neither quiet nor refreshing, and he had no thought but to find an occasion to escape from his unjust confinement."

The occasion was soon found. He escaped in the disguise of a peasant, and, in a few days, by using great care and watchfulness, he was able to reach the sea-coast on foot.

In May of the year 1520, Gustav Erichson arrived by a Lübeck ship in Calmar, the only Swedish city, beside Stockholm, which still resisted the Danes. Stockholm was already surrounded by land and by sea, so that, unable to enter the city, Erichson wandered in disguise through the adjacent districts of Smaland and Södermannland.

Then Stockholm fell, and Sweden was at the mercy of the Danes. But Christian assumed a conciliatory mien, not as conqueror, but as protector of the conquered land, and convoked the nobles of the Empire to his coronation at the capital.

And now Winter had spread a mantle of snow over the blood which had flown into the Mälar.

But the Trollhätta still raged in its depths, and so long as no icy yoke was forced upon that, winter was not victorious. So long as Gustav Vasa found a faithful Swedish heart to bid defiance to danger and shelter him in a rocky covert of the North, Sweden was not overthrown, and sleep was banished from the royal couch of the Folkungs upon which Christian nightly stretched himself.

Wherever Gustav Vasa's footsteps passed, they left behind an ever widening trail. Winter and Christian of Denmark still ruled with iron sway over Sweden, but, as the warm sun which sucks at the ice and destroys in an hour the work of a long and bitter night, so were the hasty footprints of Gustav Erichson through the land never more to be effaced by Danish spies. Whispered words passed like secret droppings from mouth to mouth, and angry, menacing looks followed the departing soldiers. Many a rusty blade gleamed again at dead of night in the light of a lonely oil-lamp as its owner carefully polished and tested its steel. The seed of the Stockholm massacre strewn broadcast by the tireless sower, Gustav Erichson, began to sprout. Spring had not yet come in Sweden, but a breeze blew through the mountains heralding its approach.

CHAPTER XIII.

Torpa Castle was buried in silence and snow. The frozen mirror of Lake Wener stretched its measureless expanse of white to the north. Sweden of the 16th century possessed, beside its water-courses, few other streets of communication, and those few were now so obstructed by snow that a horse could scarcely venture with safety upon them. But even had the roads to and from Torpa been free, no one would have made use of them. Its inmates lay under the ban of the Danish ruler and this fact precluded visitors. No footsteps led towards or away from Gustav Stenbock's home, save, occasionally, those of Danish soldiers, who appeared suddenly, generally at night time, and after a vain search through the castle, left as they had come.

But one thing appeared altered. The master of the house and his blind wife, weary of fruitless contention, resigned themselves to the Danish usurpation, and the king's spies reported each time with astonishment of a more friendly reception than the last. This change of sentiment in one of Denmark's deadliest opponents, did not remain unnoticed at Stockholm. The reputation of Gustav Stenbock was great in the land, and his name was in itself an important support to a throne which had been won by the sword. The king took care, accordingly, that the news of it should be spread wherever his troops penetrated, and learned with satisfaction that suppressed imprecations were invoked upon the traitor throughout the southern and central provinces. He knew that every curse bound Stenbock closer to him, and helped to sever his connection with the party of his oppressed countrymen. His suspicions were in the mean time completely allayed by the relations of Gustav Rosen to the Stenbock family.

Gustav Rosen was the son of a brother of Brita Stenbock and of a Danish gentlewoman, who brought her husband extensive lands in Denmark. His father died early, and his mother returned with her boy to her own country. But the child had not yet reached his eighth year, when she also died, and, having no relations to care for him in Denmark, he returned to the home of his aunt, Brita Stenbock.

Gustav Rosen had loved his mother tenderly. She seemed to him the embodiment of all that was beautiful, a being of different mould from those who now surrounded him. And like a golden setting to the picture was the home of his childhood where they had lived together. Often he would fancy the softer airs of Zealand on his cheek, and the sweet voice of his mother would ring in his ears as she lulled him to rest

with marvellous songs of the brave Waldemar and the lovely Dagmar. The green beech-trees swayed in the sun-light,—and Gerda Rosen kissed him and smiled with those beautiful lips so strangely, so mysteriously.—

A timid shudder shook the boy as he was roused from his happy dreams by the cold blast blowing through the mournful firs by the Trollhätta. The wind came up bleak and fragrantless from Lake Wener, like a message from the eternal snows of the North; the Trollhätta fell with a deafening roar, till the boy's heart grew faint with fear. He ran timidly away from these strange, wild scenes, and was met at home not by his gentle mother, but by the stern looks of his aunt who could never forgive her brother for having brought home a Danish bride. Brita Stenbock's voice was at no time soft or melodious, and with her nephew it sounded even harsher and colder than with others. Shy and lonely, the boy would creep to his dark room in the great, gloomy, sunless building, and every sad and dark and cheerless dream was Sweden, and every warm, smiling, beckoning image was Denmark.

One thing only was lacking in Denmark—the little girl with the sunny hair, who often crept into his room at night, seated herself on the edge of his bed, and wiped the tears from his lashes with her little white hand. "Don't cry, Gustav," she would say, "when I am grown, I will go with you to Denmark."

Then his eye brightened, sleep was banished, and he related over and over again what he had kept back through the day. And when, lost in the recollection of the past, he looked at Karin, her sweet child's face seemed to him to grow more beautiful and expressive till it became the sad and loving countenance of his mother. Smiling through his tears, the boy flung his arms around her neck and buried his head upon her breast, as he had so often on that of Gerda Rosen, and Karin grew sad, too, and entreated in a broken voice, "Do not cry, Gustav, you know I am to be your wife, and I will be your mother, too, and we will go together to Denmark."

Many a time in the morning Brita Stenbock found the children thus, sleeping cheek on cheek. Then heavy sentence was passed on Karin for having been disobedient again and consoled with her stubborn Danish cousin, who deserved a much greater punishment than being forced to sleep alone. Stenbock was also appealed to to chastise Gustav for having allowed himself to be consoled with, but the times filled him with mightier thoughts, and he was wont to content himself with saying, "Let the children

have their way, Brita, till their time comes."

It was perhaps not distasteful to him to perceive the growing affection between his daughter and her well endowed cousin. Stenbock's name had a better ring than the moneyed value of his estates, for they, like the other districts of central Sweden, had suffered great loss during the almost incessant wars of the past century.

CHAPTER XIV.

There was something akin in the two children which at times seemed to efface their difference in sex. It was a dreamy, thoughtful bent, which lifted them out of the thoughts and ideas of their surroundings, and contrasted as sharply with them as did their slender, delicate figures with the barren fastnesses of the Trollhätta. Their natures differed in but one respect, and this was imperceptibly increasing. The times were long past since Karin with childish zeal comforted her weeping cousin, promising to go with him to Denmark when she should be a woman and become his wife. Like the flower which silently adopts the peculiarity of the soil from which it springs, Karin was the true child of her land. Her eye flashed when she spoke of Sweden's victorious struggles against Denmark; she hated the latter with childish fervor, but Gustav shook his head smilingly, and declared that men were men either side of the Sound, and should instead of hating and fighting against each other, love one another as he loved Karin. Then the girl clenched her small fist angrily and said that Swedes and Danes never, never could be friends but were enemies from the beginning. Her playmate looked strangely sad at this till she again threw her arm around his neck and drew him close, while he told her again of the beautiful Dagmar and of King Waldemar's grief at her death, till tears started to the child's eyes and she little heeded that she for whom she wept was a Danish queen. Thus the children lived and went their ways.

Years passed; from the boy a youth had grown, from Karin a stately maiden. Yet their relations were strangely unaltered. No estrangement had arisen on her side, no maidenly reserve. Hand in hand they went ever, not regarding each other as brother and sister, for Karin still said "When I become your wife, Gustav," only dropping "When I am grown," for she was grown now. But their mutual confidence was unchanged. Neither could think now of life without the other. The playmates had merged into lovers unknown to themselves.

It was the old love, clad in the fresh robes of

spring, which was invisibly turning its garlands about them, and whose breath they inhaled with shining eyes, unknowing whence it came.

Suddenly conviction flashed upon them. Gustav Rosen had attained his eighteenth year and with it his majority. It was necessary for him to cross to Zealand in order to receive his lands in person. It was their first parting, and the thought of it rent asunder the dreamy veil which had enwrapped them. He felt he could not go without the right to return, and Karin wept.

All the members of the house of Stenbock thought they knew Gustav Rosen perfectly, but none knew him well save perhaps one, and that one was Brita Stenbock, who withheld her consent when Gustav openly sued for Karin's hand. Yet she was forced to yield, for Stenbock still persevered in his intention to "let the children have their way." Brita then endeavored to prevent Gustav's journey to Denmark, but her husband again asserted his will, declaring it not only advisable but necessary for both, who knew no life apart, to experience separation. It should be a short one, and the pain of it was lost sight of in the joy of the children at the father's consent.

The betrothal rites were solemnized according to ancient Swedish custom. The nobles of the land assembled at Torpa Castle; the drinking-bowl passed from hand to hand through the night, and many a fiery toast was drunk of love for Sweden and of hate for Denmark. Gustav Rosen was giddy with love and wine; he knew not what he had spoken on the morrow, but recalled how each had grasped his hand, how Karin's face had beamed with joy, and even Brita Stenbock's cold features had smiled upon him.

Hand in hand, as so often before, the lovers went next morning to the Trollhätta. They retarded their steps as they drew nearer the thundering cataract. Behind them came an attendant, leading Rosen's horse.

"We are taking leave of our youth, Gustav," said the girl, struggling with her tears.

He smiled, "We are taking leave of our folly, we were foolish children—"

"But happy children," she added softly. Gustav looked musingly about him. "It is all as it was when life began for us, and my heart throbs as when first you led me hither. Many a year we have sat together here, Karin, not knowing our hearts. Each thought to read the other's heart like an open book, yet this secret lay hidden in each and gave no sign. Is it the last, Karin?"

She nodded mutely with tearful eyes. He

folded her passionately in his arms and kissed her lips.

"The Trollhätta shall be the third in our bond, he is our oldest friend. Let us meet here first when I return, Karin. Promise me this. I will send word of my coming."

He swung himself upon his horse, and Karin reached him her hand in farewell. "Come when you will," she said, "I will await you at the Trollhätta. No, do not come when you will, come, when you feel that my heart can wait no longer. Think that it counts the drops of Trollhätta, and each is an eternity for Karin."

CHAPTER XV.

By a singular coincidence, the same ship, which carried Rosen from Göteborg to Copenhagen, also bore Gustav Erichson to Denmark, as hostage for the safety of the Danish king in Stockholm. Gustav Erichson was ten years older than Rosen; his earnest, manly face with clear-cut features, contrasted with Rosen's dreamy countenance as a strong tree which has resisted the storm with the slender blossoming plant. Their passage was impeded by strong winds and storms. Rosen beheld with astonishment how in the moment of danger Gustav Erichson sprang like a practised seaman to the yards of the imperilled ship, and more than once calmly risked his life for the general safety. Sympathy and dislike alternated in his feeling for the commanding individuality of the young man, whose keen eye rested on him searchingly when the talk was of the great questions then agitating the northern world. It would have been impossible to speak with him of his newly won love of Karin. The roaring waters of Trollhätta would have had more sympathy than the piercing eyes and cutting tones of Gustav Vasa.

The latter, however, was in one respect as greatly deceived as the unsuspecting Rosen. He, too, counted on a speedy return to Sweden, so soon as the negotiations for peace should be concluded in Stockholm.

Of the latter Rosen knew but little. What had it or the hereditary strife between Sweden and Denmark to do with his love? His first insight came when as they landed on Danish soil, his companion was met by soldiers, arrested and led away amid the approving shouts of the crowd. He was informed that his chance associate was the most dangerous rebel in Sweden, and that it was unwise clemency on the part of the king to bring him as a prisoner to Jutland, instead of depriving him at once of his head. It was the talk of the multitude wherever Rose

went. All spoke, too, of the impending war, which should realize the intention of the Calmaric Union. Rosen found himself for the first time in his life in the midst of a great political agitation.

No one here doubted but that he was body and soul a Dane, just as across the Sound he passed for an unquestionable Swede. Moreover, he found himself of importance, and looked up to as a rich and high-born man, whose favor was eagerly sought.

With a flush of pride—such vanity was pardonable at eighteen—he acknowledged that Denmark was his home.

But though this feeling wooed him like a playful fancy, it did not for an instant cause him to swerve. Each hour Karin was present to him; her image lent a happy charm to all he saw; from the depths of every goblet which he emptied, as from a mirror, her sweet face, framed in by lonely cliffs of the Trollhätta, smiled up at him. From Copenhagen he hastened to his estates in the interior of Zealand. There was much to inspect, much to order; dishonest servants had for years played the master, and wilfully ignored the day of settlement. Notwithstanding his imaginative nature and his youthfulness, Gustav Rosen's intelligence was keen, and he hated the falseness which met him on every hand. Thus he was forced to pass many days in order to accomplish a complete reorganization. With it all, he kept ever in view the adornment of one beautiful park on his estates. Everything that Karin loved best was grouped here; a merrily plashing brook was guided into an artificially formed channel, so that it raced down over a steep precipice, and in its fall might recall the Trollhätta. Finally, the last arrangements were completed, and, mounted on his swiftest horse, Gustav Rosen sped back to Copenhagen.

He was struck dumb by the intelligence that the war with Sweden was about to open, and no one was permitted to leave Denmark.

Gustav Rosen must cross at all hazards. He applied for permission to the most influential personages. In vain; they shrugged their shoulders, and pointed him to the rigid mandate of the king. They advised him, at the risk of forfeiting his estates, to make no attempt to carry out his plan. Notwithstanding, he made the attempt. The Swedish coast lay so temptingly near in the golden twilight; he fancied he heard the falls, and saw the blue eyes of Karin fixed upon him. He bribed a fisherman to convey him at midnight across the Sound, but close by the coveted shore, he fell into the hands of a Danish cruiser, was captured and brought back

to Copenhagen. Suspicion was strong that he had purposed to inform the Swedes of the Danish preparations. He was confined for weeks in a gloomy tower, without so much as his name being known, and with scarce food enough to sustain life, till he, at length, was able to dispatch a petition to the king.

That very day his prison doors were unbarred his forgiveness implored for his unjust confinement, and he was commanded to present himself the following day at the royal castle.

CHAPTER XVI.

King Christian II. of Denmark was a prince whose character forms one of the most remarkable contradictions of all time. In youth, licentious beyond all bounds, he still loved the fair Dyveke of Amsterdam with such tenderness and passion that he set at naught his father's threats, and endured the severest penalties rather than be faithless to his love. His nature was as despotic as that of an Oriental ruler. Whatever opposed him, he pursued by fraud or force till it was annihilated. He hated the Danish no less than the Swedish nobility, because it refused to bend like a reed under his hand. Treacherous, cruel and vindictive as the basest, he was yet brave and of keen understanding. Because he humbled the nobles, who had trodden under foot the rights of the masses, the people clung to him. But more through fear than love, for they reasoned cleverly that it was better to have one tyrannical master who relied upon them for aid, than many who leagued together to ignore their rights. Moreover, when he mixed among the lower classes, which in the interest of his far-reaching aims was frequently the case, no one in all Denmark possessed a more captivating address, a more upright sincerity and winning charm of manner than Christian II. The piercing glance of his eye, the lordly demeanor vanished. Never did mortal have more complete control over his countenance, or a more dreadful faculty of concealing his thoughts. His smile was the same whether he took the goblet from the tradesman's hand to drink his health and to drop a gold piece into it in acknowledgement, or he reached the cup with deadly poison to a powerful noble.

One tie, however, endeared the king to the entire nation. Christian was a Dane from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, and unceasingly nourished the ancient tradition of Denmark, which considered itself lord of the adjoining Sweden. The small nation of islanders

shared the chagrin of their ruler at his limited power and narrowly bounded sway. A war for the complete subjugation of Sweden attracted under his flag even those who most feared and despised him.

Soon after his accession to the throne, Christian had espoused Isabella of Spain, sister of the German emperor, Charles V., and, as a proof that, in spite of the stigma which history attaches to his name, there was in him something not altogether unworthy, this woman never faltered in her devotion to him, but accompanied him through all the ruin and misery of his after life till her death. But the love of his heart was ever for the fair Dyveke, who, in defiance of his lawful wife, occupied a wing of the royal castle. His policy was guided by the crafty mother of his mistress, the former innkeeper at Bergen, and by his fawning confessor, the former barber's apprentice Slaghök. These last constantly incited him to stricter and more injudicious measures against the aristocracy. They were the evil genii of his existence; but the bright star of his life, the only one which shed its mild rays upon Christian's gloomy moroseness, was the singular child of Holland, the beautiful, gayly-pensive "Dove" of Amsterdam. She was devoid of envy or love of power; she loved not the king but the lover, and sought with mild, beneficent hand to lead him back from the toils of dangerous intrigue which her mother Sigbrit was weaving about him. Had the wise and gentle-eyed "Dove" lived longer, history would doubtless never have chronicled a Massacre at Stockholm.

But Dyveke died. To this day her death is surrounded by mystery. The people who loved her charged the nobles with her death, and Christian, mad with grief at her loss, readily gave credence to the charge. The strongest suspicion rested on near relatives of the castle commandant of Stockholm, Torben Oxe. The latter was thrown into prison, and confessed upon the rack that he had loved Dyveke before the king had known her. In a phrensy of rage Christian commanded him to be beheaded and burned, and is said to have scattered the ashes to the winds with his own hand. Then began a bloody persecution of the nobility, wherever the suspicion of complicity in Dyveke's death extended. Countless heads fell under the axe, and old Sigbrit busily fanned the flame. Finally when even the mob began to murmur at the extermination of the noblest houses, she skillfully directed his fury towards Sweden and its nobles. The Stockholm Massacre was determined upon years before its execution.

CHAPTER XVII.

Strange that two men of such opposite kind and direction as Christian II. and Gustav Erichson should ever be of one mind. Yet so it was. The former resolved to root out the aristocracy in order to subjugate Sweden; the latter, however much he might abhor the bloody crime of the Danish tyrant, realized that the death of the nobles at Stockholm was the signal and the essential condition for the overthrow of the Danish rule. Gustav Vasa knew that the longed-for independence of his country was only possible through the complete suppression of the powerful magnates whose ambition and jealousy prevented union and strength.

Christian II. had become since Dyveke's death more morose, pitiless and secret than before. His good star had set. He passed his time in his castle in solitary musing, devising his deadly, far-reaching plans.

At this time Gustav Rosen's petition reached him. King Christian possessed many of the qualities of a great statesman. He was familiar with the history of each of the more important of his subjects, and knew instinctively where his own advantage lay. He bade the youth relate the history of his short life, he listened with attention and sympathy to his narration, and smiled when Rosen spoke of Karin Stenbock's beauty.

Before Rosen had finished, the division in his feeling lay clear before Christian, and he comprehended the worth which he might have for his plans. Though he denied his request to be permitted to return at once to Sweden, he dismissed him with great condescension, promising in a few weeks to himself conduct him over the Sound, and giving him his royal word that if Brita Stenbock should take umbrage at the delay, he would in person make good the breach. At these words, an ominous light shone for a second in Christian's eyes, then he conducted the youth to the door of the apartment, and, reaching him his hand in sight of the wondering attendants, dismissed him with great favor.

Gustav Rosen numbered nineteen years, and had grown up under Brita Stenbock's stern rule. He was enchanted with the hour spent with Denmark's sovereign. The dark deeds of vengeance had been committed before his time; he had scarcely heard of them, and the universal enthusiasm for the war against Sweden effaced the memory of them in the minds of the people. True, the thought that Karin was a Swede fell now and then like a shadow over him, but what signified the accident of birth compared with his or her love? He, too, was by birth a Swede, and

yet the old feeling he had had as a child had verified itself,—that Denmark was his home. It must be hers also, so soon as she should know it, as it had been his mother's and the beautiful Queen Dagmar's. For did not all their images blend tenderly together in his early recollections?

Yet he was forced to submit. Weeks lengthened into months, and he could only send longing thoughts across the narrow strait, and not so much as one reassuring message to the loved one. But at last,—at last, King Christian and his army prepared to move. Gustav Rosen received orders to hold himself near the person of the king. He had never borne arms against the land of his forefathers, and the crafty monarch did not by a word express that he should do so. But he kept him closely in the camp, where he was treated with flattering respect. Yet the youth was aware that he was narrowly watched, and that any effort to reach Torpa against Christian's command would be as futile as his attempted flight across the Sound. He followed the campaign with indifference, vainly striving to curb his hot impatience. He was a witness of the bloody battle of Vogesund, where the brave Sten Sture met his fate, and Sweden fell a prey to the Danish invader, but he had no conception of the import of that momentous day.

On the evening of the same, the king found him leaning in mute despair against a tree, gazing into the moonlight. Christian was in his suit of mail. He had thrown himself with fiery impetuosity into the heat of the battle, and decided the issue in his favor. Smiling grimly as he approached from behind, he tapped his shoulder and said,

"If the Rose of Trollhätta loved me, Gustav Rosen, I should saddle my horse, and ride to her within the hour. Greet her from me, and greet like wise Brita Stenbock, her mother. If she is not content with her son-in-law, bring her in November to my imperial capital of Stockholm. I have a remedy for that. I shall await you there on the first of November. Do you understand me?"

Five minutes later Rosen sat in his saddle, galloping off into the night. When the day came and chased away the shadows, he rested a few hours, rather out of compassion for his beast than for himself, and sent as he had agreed a messenger to Torpa to inform Karin, and only Karin, of the hour of his coming. It was to be early afternoon, and he was careful to time his arrival to the exact hour.

And now the old elms which overshadowed the castle, and had made his room so gloomy, loomed once more in view. He passed them on

the right and hastened on; a different glamour than of old surrounded them, and his heart no longer beat timidly at sight of them, fearing his aunt's harsh voice.

Gustav Rosen smiled as he thought how all this had changed, and yet his heart beat ever quicker, fiercer, more flutteringly. Nearer and nearer roared the Trollhätta's thundering blast of welcome. It seemed but yesterday that he had ridden away, but a moment since, looking back, he saw Karin as she had kissed him and said, "My heart counts the drops of Trollhätta, and each is an eternity for me—"

If some one had pronounced at this moment the name "Vogesund," or asked him who had won the battle, he would not have heard it, would indeed scarcely have known it.

How well he knew the paths! Just around this bend, a moment more, half a moment, and he would press his love to his heart!

Now! This was the spot, and he leaped impetuously from his horse. His eyes swept the place deliriously, could he have been mistaken? Did memory deceive him and was it another spot where Karin had spoken through tears, "Come, when you will, I shall await you by the Trollhätta."

No, impossible! Each tree, each stone was fixed indelibly in his mind. She must be here, she had only hidden herself to test his patience, and he hurried up the hillside, searching behind each rock, and through every clump of trees. Thus as children they had played here, and he knew every hiding-place whence her golden hair had so often shone out and betrayed her.

In vain! He had searched everywhere and now called her by name loudly, beseechingly. The rushing of the fall drowned his cry "Karin, Karin!"

Gradually he recovered himself. The messenger must have mistaken the hour, she did not expect him yet. He climbed the hill from whence he could overlook Torpa, ready at her coming to conceal himself and steal back to the spot so hallowed by sweet memories of their parting.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Gustav Rosen had long to wait that day. Till twilight fell, and the crows flapped in swarms over Torpa, and vanished like shadows in the darkening air. Then in silence and vague foreboding he mounted his horse and rode back to Torpa.

A thousand thoughts assailed him. Had the

messenger not arrived? Had—and his heart beat anxiously—Karin been detained by illness? Had Brita Stenbock perhaps—?

He drove his spurs into his horse till, at the unwonted infliction, it shot ahead like an arrow. In a few moments he had gained the castle, had alighted at the portal and flew up the steps. A maid came in his way. "Where is Karin?" he questioned, "is she ill?"

She answered that her young mistress was well, and expecting him with impatience.

He drew a deep breath, threw open the door and entered precipitately. Karin advanced hastily to meet him.

"Gustav, Gustav!" she cried imploringly, "is it true that Sten Sture has fallen?" Her cheeks turned like fire, her eyes rested in motionless expectancy on his lips.

"Karin," he faltered, taking her hand, "did you not know that I had come? Where were you? Since noon I have waited for you at the Trollhätta."

The girl looked about her with returning consciousness, and fell sobbing on his breast.

"Oh Gustav, all is lost!" she moaned. He repeated, "All is won, we have each other once more!" and kissed her passionately.

She tore herself away and eyed him reproachfully. "You came six hours ago, and do not bring us the news till now?"

"I waited six hours for you. Did my message not reach you?" he returned somewhat disconcerted.

She said almost angrily, "Is this a time to recall childish fancies? How could I dream that you would ride past Torpa?" she added more gently.

"You had promised—if the world were crumbling about me, I would have come," he returned in a low voice. "Has our love become child's play to you, Karin?"

His voice broke in sobs. Karin bent over him and kissed the starting tears from his eyes.

"Poor Gustav," she said tenderly, "I forgot what you must have suffered in your Danish prison!"

Gustav Rosen had been "in prison," and in the turmoil and confusion occasioned by the battle of Vogesund had escaped. No one doubted it, it was most natural. The youth himself assented to it tacitly. He was as if stunned, the stirring events of the day passed in review before him without his having the power to connect them. When he attempted, as he often did, to think them over, an inexpressible sadness and weariness overpowered him. He only saw how the pallor on Karin's cheek alternated with a feverish flush as on the day of his arrival. In

the color of her cheek, in the expression of her eye, he read the history of the world. She had grown vehement and passionate as never before. Passionate in gesture when news came from Calmar or Stockholm, which still resisted the Danes, passionate in her love when her arms were clasped about her lover's neck, when her lips touched his. No longer the gentle, compassionate playmate of her cousin, but the fairest maiden of the North; fair as the ancient bards pictured Freya, or as the poets of the day personified the goddess of Liberty. And in that exquisite form dwelt two souls side by side and looked into the world through deep foreboding eyes. The one, with shining, wistful glance, fathomless as the blue of Spring and mysterious as a summer morn, loved Gustav Rosen. The other, looking with tremulous gaze far into the future, past the troubled countenance of her lover, was fixed upon an invisible goal and driven thither by an irresistible force which silenced the voices about her like the rushing and raging waters of the Trollhätta.

Karin Stenbock's first question had not been whether her father was wounded at Vogesund. She had asked if Sten Sture had fallen.

A frightful occurrence had followed in the wake of the day which sealed the fate of Sweden. The messenger who announced the approach of Gustav Rosen had also made known at Torpa the issue of the battle. And Brita Stenbock hearing it, fled forth, none knew whither. Through storm and rain she wandered in the direction of Vogesund. Hours after they found her fourteen miles from Torpa in a state of utter exhaustion. She was brought home and lay for weeks between life and death until consciousness returned. Then she looked up—but saw no more, for Brita Stenbock had become blind.

CHAPTER XIX.

What were a woman's eyes compared with the fate of Sweden? Karin wept at her mother's bedside, then was called away by a message from Stockholm. The pressure of circumstances had ripened Karin far beyond her years. Many detached links of the resistance which yet surged between rock and shore against the invaders were united in her hand. Her father took part in the defence of Stockholm, and a day seldom passed without some secret message reaching Torpa. Thus Karin, the eighteen year old girl, was forced in these matters to take her mother's place. Brita Stenbock would therefore have often lain blind and lonely in her chamber with

only the attendance of a maid, had there not been one who sat faithfully by her bedside and administered to her every wish—Gustav Rosen.

He had never loved his aunt, yet the sight of the blind woman touched him even deeper than it did Karin. Brita Stenbock was a hard woman and did not murmur; she had not a sigh for her lost sight, nor a word of thanks for the young man who watched day and night by her side and patiently bore her imperious whims and harsh words when he was unable to give her the desired information as to the events of the day. Gustav Rosen felt the loss of her eyes more keenly than that of Sweden's liberty, perhaps more keenly than she herself. She was to him no longer the stern and petulant aunt to whose will he must bend, she was the mother of Karin—whose beauty she could never again behold. But if his kind heart and tireless attention found no recognition there, Karin was doubly appreciative, and often thanked him with an eloquent look of her blue eyes and a loving clasp of her slender fingers as she said, "How good you are, Gustav!"

But that was when no messenger had arrived with urgent tidings from the battle-field. Then Karin neither saw her lover, nor heard his beseeching words. Her eyes were as blind as her mother's for all about her; she would stand as if wrapped in some magic spell, like the old bard whom the legend says stood on the brink of the Trollhätta and was drawn by the fiendish might of the thundering stream irresistibly to his doom. She had often heard the story in her childhood, and, standing by the fall, surveyed the spot from whence he was said to have sprung, not comprehending it. One peaceful twilight hour when they sat once more like happy children together, Rosen had reminded her of it. He said jestingly that he sometimes fancied her the ancient bard, and the fortunes of her country the rushing fall of Trollhätta which tore her from his arms. But he smiled confidently, saying that he could rescue her ever and again with his strong arm.

"What is it, Karin?" he asked in sudden terror. He felt a convulsive shudder pass over the girl at his words. Holding him close, she buried her head upon his breast.

Then looking up strangely, she kissed him, saying softly, "Poor Gustav, do not grow weary, for if you should grow weary and the stream had seized me, and it were too late for you to rescue me—"

She shuddered again, and threw herself back upon his breast. "Do not forsake Karin," she whispered, "for I love you so dearly—so dearly—"

Then came a day when Stockholm fell. The superior numbers of the Danish besiegers from the sea overpowered the besieged. They fled into the interior, and dispersed to the north and south. Gustav Rosen also returned to Torpa. Sweden was lost, each had now to look to his personal safety.

These were gloomy days for Sweden and especially for Torpa, though the summer of the year 1520 was one of rare beauty and brightness. But the expected persecution did not ensue. The new king appeared to embrace all his new subjects with paternal love and forbearance, to be oblivious of their resistance to his arms, and to freely forgive and forget all. In the most gracious manner he issued invitations to the entire nobility to attend his solemn coronation at Stockholm. For Gustav Rosen alone these gloomy days were happy ones. Karin seemed restored as from a long overclouded illness to health and joy and love once more. Leaning upon her lover's arm, she strolled with him over mountain and valley as in their childhood days. She smiled again and his heart pulsed anew with happy life. His world was in her eyes, from which the sombre dream had flown, and Karin's heart seemed only filled with the old, unchangeable, yet new and glorified love. He murmured burning words in her ear, and she hid her face with happy blushes upon his breast. In this quiet time Gustav Stenbock also felt great joy in his children's happiness.

But Brita Stenbock remained icy as ever towards Rosen, and was fertile in devising new excuses for postponing her daughter's wedding. But at last every reason was exhausted, the marriage was fixed for December, and the lovers silently numbered the days.

Stenbock now received the invitation and Gustav Rosen the command to appear at the coronation of Christian II.

For Karin the parting was more tearful and sorrowful than the first. The separation would be short, but that the other should also have been. Still it was unavoidable, Stenbock himself urged his son-in-law to it, since his refusal might have serious consequences. He himself pleaded an injured knee as sufficient ground for refraining from the exposure of the journey. He was as unsuspecting of danger as the others, with the exception of Gustav Erichson, but he held it ignominious to appear at the court of the monarch against whom he had borne arms.

On the day when but for Gustav Folkung's arm Karin had been drawn into the whirlpool, Stenbock had altered his resolve. All the invi-

ted guests had obeyed the king's summons, and he feared chiefly for his children's sake to uselessly provoke the monarch's anger. Without consulting his wife, of whose violent opposition he was abundantly assured, he set out for Stockholm.

At Lake Wener he met Gustav Rosen returning. Humanely roused and indignant at the bloody deed which he had witnessed, Gustav Rosen rode back at Stenbock's side to Torpa. There he was moved to more passionate expression than they had ever before heard from him, till it seemed as if he too were touched to the quick by the shame and wrong done to Sweden. And perhaps it was so, perhaps some inner voice told him that a noble nature must break loose from idle childish dreams, when a land, a nation, when his own Denmark rejoiced at the monstrous crime done by a treacherous prince to hundreds of the noblest of another race. That night, perhaps, the youth well nigh forgot Gerda Rosen and the fair queen Dagmar, the beech forests of Zealand and the sunny dreams of his infancy, and all but comprehended that other soul, those other eyes of Karin Stenbock.

CHAPTER XX.

And now all was dead and silent from the Baltic to the mountains of the North. The sunless days scarce appeared, to vanish again, devoid of color, of joy, of hope. Brita Stenbock was fortunate above the rest, she saw them not, but she heard all the more acutely and her ear told her what her eye failed to perceive.

Since that evening Gustav Rosen had not again forgotten his mother and the fair Dagmar. He had stood for a moment on a tottering ridge where a breath of wind might precipitate him either to the one side or the other. The storm which swept over Torpa had thrown him back, and the massacre at Stockholm was effaced from his soul. He did not confess it to himself, but it was so. His emotions were paralyzed since the hour when, lest Karin's room should be polluted by the tread of a foreign mercenary, he had braved the wrath of the king and the halberds of his soldiers, and smilingly stepped over the threshold which for years he had not crossed.

A dumb and nameless sorrow pierced his breast. He did not doubt Karin, he accused her inwardly of no disloyalty, but the thought that she was capable of such an act, of undertaking secretly what might dim her pure image with the breath of suspicion, this it was that filled him with sorrow and distress.

He now realized bitterly that there was in Karin's soul an unsubstantial shadow, which, rising with gigantic form, might separate them forever. Just as little as he could fathom this, could Karin in her unsuspecting innocence conceive of the sorrow of her betrothed at the affair which had thus accidentally come to his notice. What she had done was so natural, and so imperatively demanded by the circumstances, that she must have done it even with the knowledge that it would rouse suspicion. But she was eighteen and her soul was like the snowy foam of the Trollhätta.

Now that her promise was no longer binding, she related to her lover unreservedly all the particulars of the occurrence. Gustav Folkung was not the first refugee whom Torpa had sheltered. But the fugitives had in other cases applied to the lord of the castle, and it was the first time that Karin was forced personally to act with firmness and decision.

She described very simply the powerful impression which the suppliant had made upon her, how it seemed as if he commanded and she must obey. Rosen's cheek blanched as she spoke. He seemed on the point of uttering a word which should ease his palpitating breast, but he choked it back and listened in silence as the girl told of her fear when he was about to enter the room, because she had given her word to betray Folkung to no-one, and how at length, she had taken the desperate resolve to force her way through the midst of the soldiers and reach the other door of the room.

"For I feared, Gustav, that in your surprise you might betray him before I had warned you. We heard you follow us through the passage and cry, 'This way! This way!' Why did you do that?"

Her blue eyes looked up to him with unspeakable innocence. A dark flush overspread his face like that of a guilty person, he seized her hands and covered them with kisses, saying brokenly, "Forgive me, Karin. I was so bewildered by all that had passed at Stockholm, and here. I thought—I believed—to turn aside the pursuers—"

With the same steady gaze fixed upon him, she replied,

"Strange that men, who are called the stronger sex, lose their presence of mind in such a case, and do the very worst thing, for instead of turning aside the Danes, your cry put them upon our track. A moment more and it would have been too late."

She was silent for a few moments reflecting.

"But why did you come through the passage at all?" she asked. The flush on the youth's

face was an angry one now, and an ominous light glowed in his eyes. "Your room gave me the clue, Karin, your bed. When I recall the moment when I perceived those traces—" He stopped abruptly and turned away.

"You knew then that I had some one concealed," Karin continued reproachfully, "and you should have been doubly cautious, for your imprudence might expose me to the worst suspicions."

Gustav Rosen turned and looked into the girl's eyes. Reproach was in them, too, till she saw that she had wounded him, then the old happy love flamed up with such magic power that he fell upon his knees before her and murmured,

"Forgive me, Karin,—forgive me!" She knew not what to forgive. An eternity lay between the suspicion of which she spoke as that to which his imprudence might have exposed her, and between that suspicion for which he now, while his tears fell mutely on her hand, implored forgiveness. She could only repeat as on that other evening, "You are so strange, Gustav—"

She should have said, Jealousy is strange. That double headed monster which changes color with ecstasy and despair, guilt and repentance. Which like an evil spirit once conjured from the realms of shade never again forsakes the light of day. Which returns like delirium to its unhappy victim, blinding his eyes, darkening his brain, dashing him bruised and senseless to earth. Which wakes him from sleep by the rustling of a leaf, and lashes him on in pursuit of shadows. Which in lucid moments he knows as his mortal foe, against which he wars and struggles and conquers till the hour of temptation draws near, and he again falls a helpless prey.

Folkung's name never again crossed Rosen's lips, but it was engraven in ineffaceable characters on his heart. December was long past, and with it the day fixed for the wedding. The sky hung too lowering over Sweden, and Brita Stenbock's abrupt decision that now was no time for merry-making admitted of no question.

CHAPTER XXI.

The winter passed wearily at Torpa Castle. The deep snow was untrodden by footprints showing connection with the outer world, and far and wide only the cry of the ravens was to be heard about the great solitary building.

The rigid and long-continued cold made even these neighborly, for they came to the kitchen and almost plucked the morsels from the hands of the maids; they waited like doves, too, for

hours at the windows, till Karin out of pity, strewed food for them. There were among them little graceful jackdaws with shining black plumage that approached the girl fearlessly and differed little from doves. They would light upon Karin's shoulder, and daintily pick the corn from her hand.

She must have heard from them what was passing in the world, for she had certain information, though no-one entered the house. She knew of the uprising among the Dalecarlians, the "valley men," into whose rude wilderness Gustav Vasa had fled. And knew, too, with exactness the list of the unfortunates, who having escaped the Stockholm massacre were tracked by Christian's spies through the whole Swedish empire and dragged to death. Even children were not spared. At Jönköping a nobleman of the name of Ribbings was beheaded with his two sons in the presence of the king. The elder of the two numbered eight years, and when his head fell under the axe, the blood bespattered the dress of his five year old brother who stood by. The child entreated the executioner, "Please do not soil my clothes, for my mother will scold me," and the man threw the axe from his hand and refused to kill the child. But King Christian summoned another whom he bade after beheading the child to dispose in like manner of the compassionate executioner.

All these things were known at Torpa, but Brita Stenbock's countenance never changed, she uttered never a word of indignation. It was daily more apparent that the house of Stenbock had made peace with Sweden's king. That was wise, very wise, for it ranked among the first of the few remaining noble families, and might even claim through the favor of the monarch to be the greatest in the land. Whispered execrations upon their treachery to their country were angrily and scornfully uttered, and it was already noised about that upon Christian's projected return to Denmark, Stenbock was to be instated as Regent of Sweden. There were some who still doubted and angrily disclaimed the fact, but they were silenced too, when it was announced that the King was about to accept Stenbock's invitation to visit Torpa and grace the nuptials of Karin Stenbock and Gustav Rosen with his presence.

Rumor was right. Brita Stenbock had herself requested her nephew to entreat this favor of the king, and he had joyfully followed his aunt's bidding.

April was wafting a first gentle breath from the South, when Gustav Rosen left Torpa and rode over the well-nigh impassable roads towards Stockholm. Then came a message from

him that the king had consented, and would reach Torpa on the first of May, but that he himself could not return sooner, as it was Christian's pleasure to keep him till then at his side.

The Spring does not come with April in Sweden. The snow still covered Torpa, the jackdaws still waited at the windows, and still perched upon Karin's shoulder, whispering strange news from afar in her ear. They often flew up affrighted at a sudden noise. For there was much bustle in the old building which had been so silent through the winter. The hammer resounded all the day and busy hands never rested to put all in readiness for the reception of the honored guest, and for the festivities to be held during his stay.

The left wing of the castle was set apart for the king and his suite; here also, in a spacious hall, the altar was erected. The whole house, according to the custom of the north, was decked with pine and mistletoe.

Ceaseless noise and confusion reigned throughout the day. Brita Stenbock's blind eyes saw and ordered all, whilst Karin's glittered strangely as she followed her mother's directions. It was strange but unmistakable that the look had no connection with the altar which was being erected in the great hall. They were Karin's other eyes, those eyes which Gustav Rosen feared and did not understand.

Not till night came was there silence in the lonely castle. The workmen dispersed to the quarters which had been provided for them in the out-buildings. None of them passed the night in the castle. As soon as they had left Stenbock himself closed the outer doors and fastened the heavy bolts. Before daybreak no-one was again admitted, and not a sound in the great building penetrated without. Within there was now and then a strange noise, as if Karin's jackdaws had stolen an entrance and under cover of the night were cautiously flapping their way up the stairs and through the long dusky halls!

CHAPTER XXII.

It was early morning on the first of May. A brilliant cortège swept along over the broad surface of Lake Wetter, whose last ice the Motala river, but just released from its wintry bondage, had borne to the North Sea. More than one of the bystanders who gazed on the gaily-decked boats, in whose midst the royal barge was conspicuous, may have had other wishes than the timid lip dared utter as the procession again touched dry land and moved in a westerly di-

rection along the broad road, upon which for weeks past the peasants had been busied night and day.

Up in Dalecarlia, doubtless, the lips would not have withheld their curses, and King Christian, perchance, not have passed unmolested by the broad-shouldered sons of the land, any one of whom with a quick thrust of a knife, might have easily pierced the royal heart. But there was nothing to fear here. Men called it the first of May, but winter still held Sweden in its dead and rigid grasp.

Dark and cold as the winter was Christian's glance as he rode by in the pale light of the May sun, whose cold gleams put its name to scorn.

The horse which the king bestrode was black from the proudly arching neck to the flowing tail, and the scarlet housings glistened like blood on a dark background. One snow-white spot upon its forehead was like the white gleam from the royal eyes as they shot rapid glances over the groups by the wayside. His look was more steely than ever, since that night at Stockholm, and deep furrows seamed his forehead. The dreadful eyes had a threat of death in them whenever they failed to meet fearful and submissive looks. It needed but a nod of the royal head to cause the bared and blood-stained axe to descend, which the savage executioner bore conspicuously upon his back.

The only one who was unconscious of all this was Gustav Rosen. The May sun seemed to him as warm and dazzling as that of mid-summer, his eyes conjured a roseate glow upon the barren fields, and in the looks of the assembled peasantry, he beheld only curiosity and respectful awe. He rode by the king's command at his Majesty's left side, his horse bounded so joyfully beneath him that he could scarce control it. Christian was taciturn as ever. Here and there he let fall a few meagre words, which the youth, absorbed in happy dreams of the future, often failed to hear, and the king moodily let it pass. The house which he was to honor by his presence was not unimportant for his plans. In the person of Stenbock he received the homage of the surviving and fugitive Swedish nobility, at the same time he was assured of Gustav Rosen's allegiance to himself. They were traversing Falköping Field now, and the king lifted himself eagerly in his stirrups.

"We have improved upon our ancestress, Mistress Semiramis," he suddenly spoke in a sharp voice, "Margaret was not skilled in husbandry, and forgot that in order to make a wild country tillable, the stumps must be rooted out and the soil must be enriched with blood. Had she done so, the fair daughters of the land

would love us better to-day, and find us less ill-favored. Or think you, Rosen, that the Rose of Trollhätta will overlook our age in virtue of our office, and call us pleasing?"

Christian accompanied this question with a short laugh, and threw a hasty searching glance at his companion's face. Before the latter could reply, however, the king pursued, "Here lie the bones which our worthy ancestors heaped together, Rosen, and my horse's hoof cleaves now perchance the clever skull of your grandsire, who was fool enough to risk it on a thing like Sweden. We are wiser, Rosen, we will conclude no Calmaric Union upon a field sown with flesh and blood, but another union from which flesh and blood shall spring. Let us ride faster, the sun is sinking and the Rose of Trollhätta awaits us."

His Majesty King Christian II. of Sweden, Norway and Denmark was in rare good humor to-day. Those nearest in his suite exchanged meaning glances. Christian's laugh was as ominous as the glaring sunlight which breaks from a bank of thunder clouds. And now they were forced to drive their spurs into their horses and gallop in wild pursuit of the king's black charger as it shot forward over Falköping Field.

Twilight had fallen, and Torpa Castle was bright with scores of lamps and torches to receive the bridegroom and his royal escort. The master of the house waited at the entrance with uncovered head to greet his noble guest. In the shadow of the curtain of a window on the upper floor stood Karin Stenbock and looked out. Her heart beat madly and her bosom heaved. With the eyes which Gustav Rosen feared she surveyed the retinue of the king. Those eyes did not seek her lover, nor rest upon him when found, but wandered anxiously over the mounted attendants of the king, who already filled the courtyard and still thronged in with glittering halberds from without. Karin mustered their numbers rapidly, and her face grew pale. She staggered back and grasped at the curtain for support, then turned without a sound and vanished.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Gustav Stenbock meanwhile was assisting the king to alight. Christian, after a quick glance at the long and brilliantly lighted building, extended his hand graciously to his host. For an instant a sudden faintness seem to overcome Stenbock as it had, just before, his daughter. He stared at the royal hand, but his own was slow to grasp it, and was raised instead to wipe

the cold sweat which started to his brow. Christian frowned.

"You invited us in the autumn to visit you, Stenbock, our captain delivered the message at the time," he said with a scornful intonation, only intelligible to his host. "Though you did not obey our summons, nor grant us the honor of your presence in Stockholm, we know that you had sufficient excuse. You see that we bear you no ill-will, but are to-day your guest, and await your welcome."

There must have been something in these words which restored to Stenbock his wonted firmness, for he took the proffered hand and said in a steady voice, "Welcome!"

The king mounted the staircase, which was spread with rich carpets, at the side of his host, his suite following. But at the fifth step he turned.

"The king of Sweden is safe in Gustav Stenbock's house," he said, "and needs no guard. Choose twelve knights, Captain Torben, to accompany us, the others may pass the night below. Come, Stenbock, we are eager to behold the Rose which we are to place to-morrow in Rosen's hand."

And King Christian laughed once more. Gustav Stenbock's face grew whiter than the wall near which he stood, and he had all but missed his footing and reeled backward upon the twelve chosen knights. But now he advanced with his guest and conducted him with his retinue into the apartments of the left wing, where Brita Stenbock waited to welcome them. Standing erect in the centre of the first apartment, she asked, as they approached, in a firm voice,

"Do I stand before King Christian of Sweden?"

Stenbock assented; for the first time Christian's inflexible features betrayed surprise. He knew that the woman before him was Denmark's most implacable enemy, who, he had thought, would sooner lay her head upon the block than bend before him. A passing glow of genuine satisfaction lit up his hard face as Brita Stenbock continued,

"I bid you welcome, King Christian. I thank you in the name of my country, for I trust that your sojourn under this roof shall promote the welfare of Sweden."

Brita Stenbock did not change color, nor did she falter as she spoke these words. After a deep inclination, she stood, her grey head immovably erect, and her eyes fixed quietly before her, waiting for the king's hand. He took hers in visible agitation and led her to the head of the long banquet-table in the adjoining room, where she seated herself by his side, and, directing the attendants who stood behind her,

performed the duties of hostess with as much grace and precision as if her eyes had power of sight. It was apparent from the care with which in her blindness she still sustained the dignity of the house, that she was a remarkable woman, and that she was not unconscious of the scrutinizing gaze of her guest. King Christian now arose, and touched the goblet of his hostess, which she with unerring hand advanced to meet his.

"To the health of this house!" he said and drank.

"To the health of Sweden!" responded Brita Stenbock, and, draining her goblet to the dregs, reseated herself calmly.

The lights from the walls were reflected in the heavy silver service which decked the table, they sparkled back from the red wine, and the odor of the tempting viands which were being carried in began to fill the hall. The king seemed well content, though his eyes still sought something. Soon, however, he turned somewhat impatiently to his hostess and asked,

"And the Rose of the feast to which we are bidden, why does she tarry? Methinks I see yonder a pair of expectant eyes which with still greater right put the question."

He motioned towards Gustav Rosen, who sat mutely in the centre of the table, apparently blind and deaf to all about him. The youth had, so soon as he could withdraw himself from Christian's side, gone in search of Karin. He had hastened through the entire castle without finding her. Everyone had seen her but the moment before, but no-one knew where she had gone. Entirely absorbed in his perplexing thoughts, Rosen failed to perceive the king's gesture. But suddenly he sprang up rapturously, for the delinquent herself stood upon the threshold of the dining-hall.

Karin was still pale, but in the ruddy light of the torches her beauty was only heightened. She wore a long trained robe of costly white material, and about her waist a blue girdle—the colors of Sweden. Her hair dropped its sunny wealth over her bare shoulders. It was a lovely and light royal sight, as she advanced into the full blaze of the lights. Every eye turned upon her in wonder, every goblet about to be lifted to the lips was involuntarily lowered.

But only two of those present at the banquet sprang up from their seats, Gustav Rosen and King Christian of Sweden. Karin was near to the latter, who reached her first and cried,

"By my faith, Rose of Trollhätta—for your name need not be spoken to tell us it is you indeed—you are guilty of high treason for each moment of absence from our sight.

In punishment you shall be separated this evening from your betrothed, whom thousands shall envy this prize. Sweden's queen is not here to occupy her rightful seat, and after her, you are the worthiest. Come, maiden, and we challenge all present to follow our example and greet the queen of the evening."

He seized the girl's hand and led her like a princess to the seat at his right. Karin's eye met her lover's with a hasty glance of welcome, then with the lofty pride of a veritable queen she seated herself at Christian's side. He, still standing, emptied his goblet in her honor. The knights in attendance did likewise, bending low before the daughter of the house; there was that in the king's eye as he rivetted his gaze upon Karin which caused them to bend lower than they would in all likelihood have done before the real Queen of Sweden in her castle at Copenhagen. Rosen could not credit his senses. Was that the same Karin who was willing to sacrifice her lover for the sake of her country? There were those other eyes which he feared, which knew naught of Gustav Rosen and yet which now hung upon every movement of King Christian. She smiled upon him and he drank wine she poured for him. One could see the blood mount into the girl's face at the flatteries he whispered low in her ear.

"She is more beautiful than the Dove of Amsterdam, she will bring good luck to Sweden," whispered the knights among themselves.

Had Karin Stenbock seen but one road which led to Sweden's salvation, and would she tread it as did once Esther to the throne of the Persian Kings? Then shall posterity admire your strength, Karin Stenbock, perhaps give you honor, but your love was false and your heart is corrupt. Pause once more! You tremble still and anxiously seek your father's eye. Is it he who has sold you for the welfare of Sweden? Whose unwavering look bids you enter with courage the path of treachery to Gustav Rosen?

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was a night of feasting such as Torpa rarely if ever had witnessed. King Christian was ordinarily abstemious; since the Stockholm massacre he never drank wine which had not first been tasted by another. But every doubt vanished at Karin's side, and he emptied each cup which her white hand filled for him. His eyes hung enraptured on her face; his tongue became heavy with wine, so that he could no longer whisper, but spoke so loudly that Brita Stenbock was a forced listener to each of his

impassioned words. But she like her husband sat unmoved, like an ancient effigy upon her high carved chair. Gustav Rosen likewise replenished his goblet freely from the tall silver tankard and emptied it quickly. He tried to drown every thought, to render himself miserable—till the morrow. It was past midnight, the king seemed desirous of concluding the festivities, and yet hated to give the signal. His hand rested on the arm of Karin's chair, he opened his lips to speak, but closed them again. "Beautiful Karin," at last he said as softly as was in his power, "it is time for us to part. I must sleep under your protection, sweet Rose; where have you placed me? Am I far from you? Sleep will shun my eyes if I no longer hear your soft breathing."

The color died out of the girl's face, but she remained as in a trance by his side as he continued with heavy tongue, his maudlin gaze upon her. "Do you know that I have the right to watch over you this night, to have a care that no one molest you? I might forbid you to lock your door, but I only entreat, Karin, not as a king who can command, but as a friend who before the day breaks must speak with you. Will you expect me? If not, my horse shall be instantly saddled, and I shall ride away, and another may lead you to the altar—if he dare. Do not answer, drink a yes to me if you will expect me."

This time the king had spoken so low that no one heard his words but she to whom they were addressed.

Karin raised her cup, but her hand trembled till the wine spilled, and spread like blood over the table, and her imploring eyes passed by the king and sought her father's face.

"Courage!" said Stenbock's unflinching eye, "Courage!"

And Karin pledged the king and drank.

His eyes glowed like the fire of the spilled wine. "See to it," he whispered, "that my attendants are so disposed of, that none can hear or disturb us, I have much to say to you, Karin."

The fingers of the royal hand, resting upon her chair, advanced boldly and closed upon her own, whilst with the other he unclasped a heavy bejewelled chain from his neck and slipped it into her lap.

"Hang it upon the knocker of your door," he said, "that I may know the beauteous garden where such a rose blooms. And tell me how I may reach it unobserved."

A snow figure, shaped by children's hands, is not whiter than was Karin Stenbock's face as she bent toward the king and murmured brokenly and almost inaudibly.

"A passage leads from your door to the right; count thirteen steps and turn to the left, and you will reach a door which leads to me. The chain will guide you—an hour after all is quiet, I shall expect you."

The girl's strength was spent, her head fell back powerless against her chair. King Ahasuerus surveyed her once again with covetous eyes and arose. "Our queen is weary," he said aloud, filling his glass once more. "let us drink to her dreams to-night."

Again the goblets clashed and the courtiers bent low before the new sun of May which had risen at midnight to their astonished view. Then they prepared to follow the king, but he waved them back.

"We need no watch to-night, Captain Torben, we wish to rest undisturbed. Our hospitable entertainer has without doubt made such provisions that you may sleep off his excellent wines on soft couches. Our thanks, Stenbock, we are satisfied. Rosen will permit us to return thanks to our hostess, according to time-honored customs."

Christian's licentious nature was past control, at the last words he threw his arm about Karin's neck and pressed a kiss upon her forehead. "In an hour," he whispered.

Esther's painful struggle was ended.

"In an hour," she repeated softly but steadily, "do not forget what I have said."

CHAPTER XXV.

Silence reigns in Castle Torpa. Night broods over Sweden, only the cloud shadows which drift across the moon linger upon the battlefields of Falköping and Vogesund, and only the waves of the Mälar splash against the castle-steps at Stockholm and seek to wash away the blood-stains from its granite foundations. They send spring greetings to the westward; the waters of Lake Hielmar hear them and waft them on across the boundless expanse of Lake Wener. And the Trollhätta thunders to its depths, Spring is at hand!

Karin's jackdaws have also heard it, and are rejoicing in the May moonlight. Perhaps they fear the glittering halberds which fill the garden and the court around Torpa, lest a shadow of the earth or air approach unnoticed the royal couch, for they gather on the solitary shore of the Trollhätta. The snow which spread a white mantle over the rocky ascent, has not yet yielded to the sun of May, and their dark forms are plainly seen upon its glittering surface. They appear silent, but it is possible

that the blast of the Trollhätta drowns the sound. The night is so clear that one can count them as they approach across the Götaelf at the head of the falls. There are just forty; they cross the stream, follow it a little downwards then suddenly slip into the hillside, where their rocky nests must be, one by one, and vanish, as if scattered by the wind, from the face of the moonlit valley.

Only the measured pacing of the sentinels disturbs the quiet which envelops Torpa, the lights and the torches are all extinguished and the great house is still. Captain Torben and his men are reposing on soft couches in the second story, Stenbock's wine deadens their senses, not one hears the roaring of Trollhätta which thunders miles away through the night.

In a high and dimly-lighted chamber sits King Christian II. upon a richly cushioned arm-chair. He had thrown himself for a moment upon the silken bed, which is surmounted by a massive gilt crown, but impatience and expectation had prompted him to leave it. He is looking intently at the crimson window-hangings, which fall, in the shimmer of the night-lamps, like broad stripes of blood from ceiling to floor. The air from the window which the king had opened to cool his heated brow, moved them softly to and fro till one might fancy that blood were slowly trickling from the walls. Since the autumn of the preceding year the sovereign of the three empires of the north was timid and superstitious—that color was odious to him and he now sprang up from his seat, and bending down, stares fixedly at the curtains.

No, he is not thinking of the bloody heads which in the autumn had rolled at his feet in Stockholm, not now, a stronger charm holds his fears in check. Before his fancy rises another head with golden hair falling over white shoulders, and he listens to the silence in the house. Now he throws off his outer garment beneath which a glittering, thick-meshed shirt of mail of fine and pliable steel is visible. He hesitates a second, then throws this, too, hastily aside and wraps himself in a long, loose robe of dark rich material. King Christian is still in his forties, and as he passes the tall mirror of polished metal it reflects a form of fine and kingly aspect, of one who needs not be a king in order to win the heart of an eighteen year old girl. It is not the wine alone which has effaced the sullen scowl and suspicious look which are wont to disfigure his countenance. King Christian loved the fair Dyveke not less hotly and passionately than Gustav Rosen loved Karin Stenbock, and the Rose of Trollhätta is not less fair than the Dove of Amsterdam.

You have reached your desire, Esther. Tomorrow you shall command the sullen ruler of your country, and Sweden's salvation, for which your eyes—those other eyes—have long watched in vain, shall lie in your white hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Is Karin thinking of this as she stands there in her room, with this hand pressed upon her wildly throbbing heart, and the golden chain upon the knocker whose diamonds shed their shining beckoning lustre upon the surrounding gloom?

Her face is still as pallid as when she sat at Christian's side. But she trembles no longer, she is listening intently through the deathly silence of the house.

And now there comes a soft, cautious step, hardly audible to the sharpest ear, even in the complete stillness. It does not come from the hall, but from an adjoining chamber, and pauses at the door, through the opening of which Gustav Folkung had once looked upon Brita Stenbock. An almost inaudible knock, Karin pushes back the bolt noiselessly and opens. Gustav Rosen's passionate arms are around her and he covers brow and cheek and mouth with kisses.

"You would have driven me mad, Karin, had you not whispered to me that you would expect me this evening. After a month of restless nights and days away from you, I return to see you—but only to see you, as one in the distance, without a welcome from you."

His voice was loud with emotion; the girl disengaged herself from his arms, and laid a warning finger on his lips. "Hush," she whispered. Her eyes sought the door and she bent her lips to his ear and breathed the words:

"In some moments King Christian will enter that door in search of me. I fear him, therefore I have summoned you. For you are my sure defence and must remain in the next room, Gustav. It should all have been different, and mother bade me tell you nothing. But the court and garden are filled with armed men and all is changed. I could not have done it, had I not known that you would be with me."

The youth regarded her in dumb amazement, his mind wandered, he comprehended nothing that she said. Again she placed her lips to his and whispered hasty words. He started back in fright, and raised his hand to his head.

"Here, where I have led him, where my honor is at stake—impossible, never," he uttered brokenly.

Karin's blue eyes flashed dark as night. "Gustav," she said in a trembling tone, "are you no Swede? Only a Swede can possess this hand!"

He looked at her blankly, despairingly.

"The time is going, the king may leave his room at any moment," she continued hastily. "The light from his lamp in the hall is the signal for Gustav Folkung." She broke off suddenly to listen. Her eyes were turned away from Rosen's face, and she did not perceive the maddened look that crept into it. But a single spark was needed to kindle the smouldering fire of passion in Gustav Rosen's breast, and Karin had thrown it with the name which laid hold upon the blind, double headed monster in his heart and bore it triumphantly to the light.

"Gustav Folkung!" he cried with a loud, hoarse laugh, "is he coming to fetch you!—Gustav Folkung!"

Repulsing Karin roughly in her attempt to hold him back, he rushed to the door and flung it open with such violence that the gold chain fell in pieces to the ground.

The sound of his voice and his heavy tread wakens an answering echo at the farther extremity of the corridor where the flight of steps leads into the castle garden. A confused murmur ascends; there must be conflict below. There are cries of "Treason" and "Back!" but a firm voice sounds above the din and commands, "Forward!"

Those are Karin's jackdaws. They vanished into the earth and now reappear. No one will yield the lead to another, they storm forward in a solid body through the narrow passageway.

A second more, and they will have cut off retreat for the man who advances in a loose robe shielding his light with his hand. King Christian's fevered senses have perceived nothing, he counts thirteen steps and turns to the left.

Then Gustav Rosen rushes like a madman upon him, and grasps his arm, crying, "Save yourself." He drags the king back to the chamber he had just left. "You are betrayed! Gustav Vasa has forced his way by a subterranean passage into the castle!"

Those are no jackdaws which crowd into the halls. They are the herculean forms of the Dalecarlians, each of whom might bear the sovereign of the Northern Empires like a child in his arms. Gustav Stenbock leads them on. The plan is unsuccessful. All depends now upon despatch, no longer upon secrecy.

"Where is the tyrant?"

Reaching Karin, who has hastened after her lover, she indicated the way.

Every gleam which Rosen loved has died out of her eyes. With lips trembling with scorn and anger, she cries, "He flees to his room, Gustav Rosen has betrayed us!"

A wild curse breaks from the lips of the foremost and Gustav Folkung, sword in hand, plunges in the direction which she indicates. The fugitives are still in the corridor; the king's lamp is extinguished and in the wild flight the door is past. Their life, Sweden's fate hangs upon a second.

But Gustav Rosen knows every inch of Torpa Castle even in the dark. Feeling his way back, he finds the door, drags the king in with him, and shoves the bolt within just at the moment when Folkung's hand strikes the heavy metal knocker from without.

"An axe! Hew down the door! Enter the room by another door, Stenbock!"

But the door resists, and Gustav Rosen's voice sounds from the window:

"Help! Rescue the king!"

In a twinkling the silence of the night has fled. Hundred-voiced tumults arises on every side, the clash of arms comes up the broad stairs; Captain Torben and his comrades spring from their beds, and, seizing their swords, reel half-clad to the spot. They meet Stenbock and his band, who endeavor to penetrate into the king's chamber through the banquet hall.

The spears with which the fearless Dalecarlians are wont to confront the bears in their dens strike mortally into the naked breasts of the Danes. Knut Torken, still heavy with sleep, staggers toward the sturdy form of the lord of the castle and cries:

"We sleep under your roof! Is that Swedish hospitality, Gustav Stenbock?"

"Stockholm hospitality, Knut Torben! You have taught it us!" thunders Stenbock and his uplifted sword descends upon the temples of his foe, who with a cry falls to the ground near the spot where a few hours since he had drank to the health of the man who has dealt him his death blow. The battle rages around the long table; but the fallen Danes have for a moment held back the mountaineers from the king, and at Rosen's call help comes from below. The torches which the soldiers have hurriedly lighted throw a ruddy glare through the hall and passages.

"Lost! Back!" cries Stenbock in a hollow tone. The Dalecarlians are forty against a hundred. It would be an act of desperate folly to pursue their object longer. And now there is danger of being cut off from retreat. Stenbock calls this to Folkung who turns and seizes Karin standing like a marble image watching the

approach of the Danes, in his arms.

"We shall meet again, Christian!" he says grinding his teeth. Then with the muscular strength of the best of his stalwart comrades he bears the girl away with him. The others follow with a resistance as stout as the brave band of Leonidas at Thermopylae. Their short weapons are unavailing against the long halberds of the Danes, but their bodies in falling obstruct the narrow passage.

At this moment King Christian appears in coat of mail at the door through which he had fled. He is followed by Gustav Rosen, who overlooks with ashen face the scene of desolation which his cry has conjured up. The torches flicker horribly upon the dead faces on the floor. His searching eye espies over the heads of the combatants at the end of the hall a white point. It is Karin's dress. Roused from his momentary stupefaction, Gustav Rosen plunges across the landing and down the main stairway. Collecting the few soldiers that still remain below, he leads them around the corner into the garden to the small door through which Karin once secretly conducted Gustav Folkung.

"This way!" With a massive halberd snatched from the nearest soldier he strikes a thundering blow upon the wood. His comrades follow it with a hundred others. The door gives way, Rosen's vehemence removes the last resistance. For the second time he confronts Gustav Folkung's flaming eyes upon the same spot. But this time they have no power over him; unheeding the spears of the Dalecarlians who press close upon their leader, he grasps at Karin's arm. She lies as if bereft of life on Folkung's left arm, while the latter with his right tears open the heavy oaken door of the subterranean passage.

"Karin!" cries the youth, "Karin!"

The bitter sorrow and despair of that tone might call the dead to life. It wakens Karin from her stupor, it is the chord of the old love vibrating upon the heart strings and she opens wide her eyes and looks at him.

"Karin!"

"Back, traitor!" Her features contract spasmodically, her outstretched hand motions him back with a gesture of contempt.

Gustav Rosen might have thrown himself upon Folkung and held him back. His arm is raised in the attempt, but his hand sinks down before Karin's look. It is his last, for her white dress vanishes, swallowed up in the darkness beyond the oaken door. Motionless as one whom the fire from heaven has struck, the youth braves the fierce countenances of the on-thronging valley-men.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The soldiers who follow him draw him back and rush forward to protect his defenceless breast. The struggle rages now at this end of the narrow way, but here the Swedes gain the advantage, for though enclosed on either side, they succeed in forcing the Danes back to the outer door, and holding the entrance to the underground passage-way. The soldiers, imagining them captive below, relax their effort. A dozen Dalecarlians lie transfixed by halberds among fully half hundred of the satellites of the king. But the others reach the massive door, which the last warrior fighting desperately closes behind him in its creaking hinges, and secures from within by a ponderous bolt. Then wounded and bleeding, but triumphant, he follows the others who speed through the long dark passage as if over burning coals. Many a life has been thus preserved in time of stress, and so it is now. The foremost, it is true, bears another burden than that for which he had hoped. It should have been a man, and it is a girl, he should have worn upon his head the golden circlet of the Kingdoms of the North, and from Karin's drooping brow there streams only a wreath of golden hair. But Gustav Folkung holds her in his arms as he would a queen. An angry muttering trembles through the deeps of the earth. The opening is reached where a few hours earlier the jackdaws had vanished into the ground. Folkung with bended knee forces away the stone, and as the keen outer air reaches the fugitives the deafening blast of the Trollhätta strikes simultaneously upon their ear. It rouses Karin who shivers in the chill air of the May night. Gently as he would a child, her comrade wraps her in his cloak, and hurries up the stream. The others follow; a whistle, answered by a second one from the opposite bank of the Elf, and a broad dark mass moves rapidly across the river. It soon appears to be a large raft, which had been rowed from the lake to this spot. It touches the shore, Folkung springs in and deposits his burden on soft cushions in the bottom of the boat. Stenbock enters after him with gloomy brow, and the Dalecarlians fill the boat.

A sudden commotion, Karin turns and asks, "where is mother?" Stenbock utters a cry and a curse, "We have forgotten her, she is in the tyrant's power. Back!"

"Impossible!" answers the leaders firm voice, "it would be certain death and useless."

But Stenbock does not heed his words, and forcing his way through the boat's crew, endeavors to land. When suddenly a cry is heard.

"Here they are—stop them—into the water—a boat!"

It is Gustav Rosen, the only one who knows of the underground passage, and who, after the disappearance of the Dalecarlians, had gathered together a handful of soldiers, and rushed madly over the hillside to the Trollhätta. But he is again too late. Folkung commands imperatively, "Forward!" Sweden is worth more than a woman, though she be Brita Stenbock." The oars are plied and the boat shoots rapidly from the shore. The Danes raise their spears and are about to hurl them with deadly aim into the midst of the fugitives, but Rosen restrains them with the terrified outcry, "no, you will kill her—no!"

The soldiers obey wonderingly, then they press forward and detain by force the youth, who plunges into the water to follow the boat alone. They hold him fast, scornfully indifferent to his heart-rending calls, "Karin! Karin!"

The wailing cry is plainly heard out upon the stream. Not by Gustav Stenbock. His ear is deaf to it; his gray head is buried in his mantle to hide the hot, despairing tears which flow as fast as those of the young man, who has only lost what he had not yet possessed. But Folkung and Karin hear it. They hear the loud and hopeless lamentation.

"Gustav Vasa, I will do as you command, give her back to me, Gustav Vasa!"

"What name does that wretched one utter? Are you Gustav Erichson?"

"I am, Karin. You have learned it from your bridegroom's farewell words." He smiled bitterly as he spoke, and advanced quickly before the girl to shield her from the spears which on a sudden came whizzing through the air, and fell with a hissing sound into the water about them. The Danes upon hearing the name of the fugitive leader, were no longer to be restrained, and lanced their missiles now with cries of rage and fury. But the distance is too great, a few strokes of the oars, and the Dalecarlians are out of reach of danger.

"Will you return to Gustav Rosen, Karin?" asks her comrade—"speak but the word, and I myself will lead you to him."

It is the same sharp tone with which he first accosted her by the Trollhätta, and yet it quivers like the rocking of the boat.

Karin replies rapidly. "Never. There lies an abyss between us, as the Trollhätta between this and yonder shore. My heart belongs no longer to the betrayer of my people."

Gustav Erichson's firm mouth trembles perceptibly. "But to him who has liberated your country, Karin? Does your heart belong to him

who saves Sweden from the tyranny of the Dane?"

The girl trembles. She tries to answer, but at this instant the boat jars roughly on the shore, she staggers back and would fall were it not for Gustav Vasa's watchful arms. He holds her cold hand tightly in his, and whispers again in her ear.

"Who can win this fair hand, Karin?" "This hand?" It has grown so light that you may see the pallor on the girl's cheek change to glowing red; her lustrous eyes seek her father, who still sits immovably wrapped in his cloak. She repeats, "This hand?"

Then she looks the man beside her full in the eyes and says.

"This hand is free, Gustav Erichson, the Trollhätta is my witness, and belongs to him who accomplishes two things—"

The waters of the Trollhätta drown the hastily whispered words in their rushing. These are the waters of which the legend tells, that the ancient bard standing on their brink, overpowered by the demoniac power of their thunder, was drawn irresistibly into their depths.

Is she thinking of this as the cool morning air sends a shiver through her frame, and she looks at the fast-gliding green waves? Is she thinking of the words which were once wrung from her breast,

"Be not weary, poor Gustav. If you should grow weary, and the stream had seized me, and it were too late for you to hold me back—?"

No, these eyes are earnest, but they neither think of the words nor of Gustav Rosen. Her companion's eyes are earnest, too, since he has heard the girl's whisper. Bending low before Karin Stenbock, he speaks,

"I said that Sweden was worth more than a woman. You are the first woman, Karin Stenbock, who have shaken my resolve. Sweden's future be upon you, if it be lost for the sake of a woman."

Again he bends before her with knightly grace, then he joins the Dalecarlians who have meanwhile landed. Choosing out four from their number, he speaks with them in a low voice. The heart of the valley-men knows no fear, else might that look of the eye as they listen to his words betoken terror. But as fear is unknown to them, so also, is disobedience to their leader, and at his beck they hasten back to the boat, whilst Vasa approaches Stenbock and addresses him also in a low tone. At his words a gleam of joy lights up the face of the latter, and he makes a rapid movement in the direction of the boat. But Gustav Vasa holds him back, and continues to speak rapidly till Gustav Stenbock

unwillingly acquiesces, and gives him finally a hearty Swedish hand-clasp.

"They all must obey him," thinks Karin, as she looks upon the proud and almost kingly bearing of the youthful leader, who swings himself with his four chosen comrades into the boat, and stands erect among them, as they row up the stream.

"They all must obey him, as I do. He is like the Trollhätta."

Her musing is broken by a hand-wave from the receding boat. She beckons in return and calls impulsively, "Gustav!" Then suddenly recollecting, she adds, "Farewell, Gustav Vasa!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The first pale light of day was struggling with the fitful flare of the torches when Gustav Rosen returned to Torpa Castle. His feet carried him mechanically forward, his cheeks were hollow, his eyes dull and lustreless like one stricken with mortal disease. He walked on aimlessly, unconsciously returning to the scene of his happiness and of his misery.

In the courtyard an officer met him, and informed him that the king had enquired several times for him. Taking Rosen by the arm, he led him up the stairs and into the room occupied by the monarch.

It was plain to the initiated that King Christian was in an evil mood. In one corner of the room, surrounded by a guard of halberdiers, was a huddled group of the men and maidservants of the house of Stenbock, whom Christian, seated in an armchair by the window, called up singly and examined. Their testimony was unanimous and truthful that they had known nothing of the projected attack upon the king, and that their surprise was as great as his own. The correctness of this statement was obvious, since in the tumult none had thought of flight, and after the escape of the Dalecarlians they had surrendered unresistingly to the Danish soldiers. King Christian was likewise convinced of the truth of their declarations, for he dismissed each with a friendly smile, saying,

"You are right. I perceive that your slumbers were disturbed without cause. I will take care that it shall not happen again. Go!"

He nodded, and the prisoner was led out. But as the unfortunates emerged from the door of the anteroom at the head of the stairs, the executioner's axe descended from behind and severed the head from the body, with such fatal rapidity that the unhappy victim was cut off without a cry, the trunk fell to earth, the head flew

over the balustrade. One after another disappeared in this way, till at last there was left but one maid. The game was already growing monotonous to Christian, he rose and approached the window. Then turning to the girl, scrutinized her fair youthful face, which, presenting the genuine Swedish national type, might have been taken for a materialized likeness of Karin Stenbock. He looked keenly at her, and laughed louder than before.

"At the foot of the stairs there are a dozen tool's heads. If you wish to keep your own on your shoulders, wench, go, gather them into your apron and bring them to me!"

The girl swooned away. The king commanded her to be carried out and forced to execute his order.

"The girl is like the daughter of the scoundrel Stenbock; mayhap a step-sister of whose existence our good hostess dreams as little as of the heads which are rattling down her stairs," whispered one of the king's suite to his neighbor.

The speaker shrank back at an awful glance from Christian's eye. At the same time the king rushed towards the door and seized the half-unconscious girl by the shoulder with a grip like iron. He turned her head with a quick wrench and glared with brutal ferocity into her face.

"He is right, it is the same breed," he muttered, "that is the face that betrayed me."

And before the girl could fall upon her knees, King Christian II. of Sweden, Norway and Denmark had snatched a sword from a soldier standing by, and hewn the head of the newly pardoned girl from the body. It rolled with its masses of flaxen hair to the ground. At this moment Gustav Rosen entered the hall. The king's watchful eye espied him at once, and, laughing loudly, he advanced to meet the youth.

"Yonder lies your fair one's head, Rosen, kiss it!" he cried.

The young man's senses were so disordered that the sight of the blonde-haired head with that likeness still strong in death, almost overpowered him. But Christian's boisterous merriment recalled him to consciousness.

"It is not she this time," continued the king, "the Rose of Trollhätta has escaped us both—a curse upon it!" The veins upon his forehead swelled almost to bursting, and he stamped upon the ground till the house shook and the lookers-on shrank back trembling. "Who is the knave who let her escape? You are all traitors who should be drawn and quartered."

No one ventured a word. The monarch's face was hideously distorted; like one seized with sudden madness he raised his sword from the floor where he had thrown it and brandished it

whizzing through the air close upon the terrified Danes. They had seen him so but once before, and that was after the death of the Dove of Amsterdam, who, rumor said, had been poisoned under connivance of Torben Oxe. And this wild phrensy took possession of him, it was clear, not when his royal authority had been defied, but when one hidden chord, unknown to men, was struck in his heart. Not Gustav Erichson, but Karin Stenbock it was, who had heightened his fury to madness. Gradually, as his passion met with no resistance, it subsided. He took his sword blade and holding it for a moment between his fingers, surveyed the blood upon it, then seated himself stolidly in the arm-chair, rested his hand upon the hilt of his sword and said,

"Lead in Brita Stenbock!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Some moments elapsed before she whom he demanded appeared. Her arms were laden with heavy chains, such as the Dane-prince carried upon all his travels. But she wore them like impalpable things; not a muscle of her face bespoke fear or emotion. At the sight Gustav Rosen reeled for support against a pillar, his eyes rested in horror upon his aunt's motionless face, and a deep flush crept up to his temples with the consciousness of his guilt. For some seconds there was deathly stillness in the great hall in whose centre stood Brita Stenbock, proudly erect. At length she broke the silence, and asked in a clear voice,

"Who has summoned me?"

The king started. His looks had been bent upon the ground. "I," he answered unsteadily.

"That is Christian of Denmark's voice." To look at him one would have fancied that the blind orbs of his implacable enemy had regained their sight, so timidly did he avoid the direction in which they were set. Again there was a pause, then suddenly he ordered,

"Remove her chains!"

The halberdiers obeyed exchanging looks of surprise. The king rose and advanced hesitatingly some steps towards her,

"Brita Stenbock, you would have murdered me?"

"I would have executed sentence upon you; murder *you*," she returned coldly.

Could he, whom all feared, be afraid of a woman? He fixed his eyes anxiously on her face, he had no dominion over Brita Stenbock's sightless eyes.

"You bade me as a guest to your house, I

trusted in Swedish hospitality," he went on slowly.

"You bade the nobility of Sweden to your castle at Stockholm, they trusted in Danish hospitality."

Christian cast down his eyes. Was it exhaustion after the wild uproar? His lips quivered, he nerved himself with difficulty to proceed.

"You gave me your hand and welcomed me to your home, Brita Stenbock."

"You gave your hand to each of your victims and welcomed those you were about to murder. I thanked you in my country's name, and said I trusted that your sojourn in this house would be for Sweden's welfare. You drank to the health of my house and I to Sweden's health. Why were you blind to the meaning of my words? Why was your clear vision obscured by blindness?"

There was disdain in her word and accent; the Danes looked in breathless amazement from the fearless woman to their king, whose altered face wore a look of strange dread. He raised his hand to his brow and attempted to speak, but his breath came hard and his tongue was heavy as he said,

"It is force against force, cunning against cunning. You hate me, and you are right, Brita Stenbock. Between us men there is strife and intrigue, and I hold you as a man. You have fought bravely, I recognize this, and honor you for it the more. Tell me truly—your mind conceived the plan and you alone knew of it. You laid the snare cautiously, unaided and alone. Say yes, and I will reward the greatness of the act, and you are free."

A hundred eyes are bent upon Brita Stenbock. In all the seeing throng has she alone the gift of sight? The keen eye to discern the one spot in the meshes of his coat of mail where a sharp dagger might be driven through to the heart, to the stony heart's core of her mortal enemy?

The blind woman's face lights up with a mocking, triumphant smile.

"No, Christian of Denmark, you esteem me beyond my due. The advice alone was mine, but neither the plan nor the execution. You were outwitted by a girl; my daughter conceived the plan. She did not know you, nor expect that you would lead an army to a marriage-feast. There should have been a battle at Torpa, and you should have been judged before the altar. But when my daughter beheld the numbers of your followers—"

King Christian's hand drooped over his eyes.

"When your daughter beheld the numbers of my followers—" he repeated in a strangely broken voice.

"She came to me and said, Christian of Denmark is not only a tyrant, he is a fool as well. Is it worth the price of Sweden's liberty and his ruin, mother, that for one evening I play the role of the Bergen innkeeper's daughter?"

Even Brita Stenbock started back in affright at the fierce, agonizing groan which broke from the king's lips as he fell back into his chair and covered his face with his hands. The inmates of the room almost ceased to breathe. Heavy drops like the blood which stained the floor rolled from beneath the royal hand to the ground; it was so still that their falling was audible. Then his hands relaxed and tightened again in convulsive grasp over his sword-hilt, which he wrenched from its hold in the floor. And King Christian laughed loudly as he said,

"Your story is well told, Brita Stenbock, but time will not admit of our listening longer. So we, the Tyrants, have undermined Swedish hospitality, Swedish faith and manly honor? You are right again, we were fools."

"You may scoff, Christian," broke in the aged woman fearlessly, "but I have probed you. My eyes are blind and others may think you smile. I see you, I see your heart, and know how it bleeds under my hand."

The king lifts his sword, and with a fierce outcry rushes upon the defenceless woman. A moment more, and the girl's fate would have been hers, and the grey head have lain by the flaxen. But this time Gustav Rosen sprang suddenly forward and caught the all but fatal blow upon his arm. For a moment Christian stood motionless, and glared at the youth's pallid face. Then dropping the sword from his bended fingers, he said frostily,

"I thank you, Rosen. You have lost a bride through me, I will provide you with another. Are you ready, Brita Stenbock?"

The meaning of the last question lay not in the words, but the tone. All understood, not less she to whom it was addressed. But there was no shrinking, no faltering. She lifted her head proudly. "You do not judge me, Christian, you but kill me. Death has for me no terrors, and of what does it avail you? Your sword may rob me of life, but the spirit of this race you cannot quench. My eyes are blind, but through their night the future is visible to me. The day is near when all Sweden will be a Torpa; I see more bloodshed than has flowed into the Mälar, but it rolls on to the Sound and is bright with the glare of myriads of torches.

In their light I see you, Christian of Denmark, powerless, forsaken, execrated and abhorred. I see you bowed under the maledictions of your people, laden with the scorn of humanity, beating with ghastly brow against your prison bars. I see the mocking shapes of your victims taunting you with your evil deeds and the throne you cannot hold. Then shall the Trollhätta shout the pæan of Sweden's liberty, and every ear shall hear it as I do now."

She spoke with majestically uplifted arm, and as she ceased the Trollhätta responded with its distant thunder, and it seemed to all present as though its surging waves announced that the last ice of the Winter was broken and that Spring was at hand.

King Christian also listened for a moment. But it was with the old face of evil presage over whose sphinx-like stolidity the treacherous smile flitted like the deceptive fire of the ignis fatuus.

"Your eyes are still too keen, Brita Stenbock, they look too far into the future," he said scoffingly. "I will place a light for you that you may perceive what is near. I will erect a vast monument in your memory, around which the Trollhätta shall rage no more; for it is mine, and its waters shall flow in future as peacefully and smoothly under my hand as your people. The spirit of this race shall not spread abroad through the land, and Sweden shall not become a Torpa, for the great torch you beheld is Torpa, in whose light you shall lie powerless and forsaken.

No, not forsaken utterly—"King Christian turned hastily—"I said I owed you thanks, Gustav Rosen, for reminding me of what befits the king and what the hangman. You will comprehend that it is out of my power to present your young bride to you at this moment, but I have come to your marriage, and for a few fiery instants perhaps an old one, one too of the same noble blood will suffice.—Captain Wolmarson!"

The officer approached and Christian whispered a few hurried words in his ear. Again he turned towards Rosen.

"Your estates shall be well cared for, have no fear, Rosen; my thanks for them." And with a lightning glance at Brita Stenbock's unmoved face, the king left the apartment. Horns sounded for the departure, in a few moments the court was filled with horsemen, and the sovereign gave the order for march. Five ready saddled horses still waited at the door, those of Captain Wolmarson and his band.

The latter are not soldiers, they are the assistants of the man who now throws off his long red mantle, disclosing beneath a tight-fitting

waistcoat, and proceeds to bind Gustav Rosen's hands roughly behind his back. Though it may cost him his head if King Christian hear of it, the officer standing by cannot suppress a shudder as the men with coarse jests fetter Brita Stenbock hand and foot, and chain her together with the youth fast to the altar, which was destined for him for another solemnity. And now it is finished, and the chief as he strides away calls,

"The bridal pair is ready. A proper bridegroom, a fair bride. Call the parson to pronounce a blessing."

One of the attendants springs to the kitchen and returns quickly. With a horrid laugh, he divides his burden among his fellows, and they disperse through the rooms adjoining the hall. The Danish captain rushes down horrorstruck into the open air and throws himself upon his horse, five minutes later the others follow and gallop rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXX.

Again there is the silence of the grave in Torpa Castle, silent as at that ominous hour when Karin stood waiting for the Dane King in her chamber. The first rays of the sun flamed upon the gray gables, and through the tall, leafless elms—but the stillness of death reigned in the Castle. Still and dead lay the heaped-up bodies of friend and foe; the headless trunks upon the bloodstained staircase looked with staring, wide-opened eyes before them. Not a sound of life, of joy or of sorrow.

A cry of anguish would have been a god-sent boon in that horrible silence, which was only broken, first here, then there, by a strange, low crackling, as if by some mysterious, unearthly medium the walls were beginning to crumble.

Then a human voice sounds through the desolation, "Mother, do you hear?"

It is Gustav Rosen's voice as he vainly strives to loose his bands. But his fettered arms fall powerlessly at his side.

Brita Stenbock hears, but her answer is as stern as though he stood before her a youthful culprit awaiting punishment.

"I am no mother of yours, Gustav Rosen, and I thank heaven I was spared that shame. Rather this bridal torch which Christian of Denmark has lighted than at this altar to have given my daughter into your perfidious hands. My blood and the blood of the brave ones who fell yonder for Sweden's liberty be upon you!"

The crackling increases and rolls like the voice of the storm through the halls, a sound as if the

fallen dead had risen and were groping with heavy tread among the corpses of their fellows to waken them as well.

"Mother," cries the youth passionately, "you are Karin's mother. Give me farewell in her name. In a moment we go together where there is neither Swede nor Dane, but where forgiveness, mercy and love abide forever. Be merciful, mother!"

A tremor shook the strong woman's frame. She struggled in vain to free her arm, and turned her blind eyes in the direction of the supplicant. Then a milder look overspread her stern face and she said gently,

"Your spirit did not belong to this harsh world; Heaven will forgive you, as Karin does, as I do. Sleep in peace, Gustav."

Upon an overlooking height, some five hundred steps distant from Torpa, King Christian II. and his faithful followers draw rein. His piercing eye rests with an expression of impatience upon the sun-gilded castle. But not long, and the brow clears, a rosy vapor rises from the ridge of the great building. It comes from within, and is followed ever fast and faster by dark, thick smoke-masses with occasional flashes like summer lightning. The west side of the castle lies in shadow, whilst the windows at the eastern exposure glitter in the sun; but now they flame up on a sudden on every side. Long, forked tongues leap out and up and stretch forth myriads of lurid arms to encircle the castle walls. Then the flame bursts from the roof, the southern gable totters and falls in with a mighty crash; it is followed by an ascending shower of sparks which fill the air with fiery particles. They whirl about like shining meteors and descend in a broad circuit, mingling with the spray of the Trollhätta and dropping at the feet of the Danes who are silent witnesses of the scene.

Nothing, no vestige of life approached the conflagration. The birds are startled from the elm-tops, but that is all. King Christian's eye is fixed with falcon glance upon the entrance and the grounds which surround the castle. The dead may not flee, nor the living break their fetters. Not till the roof falls in with a loud detonation is the royal eye removed. The close-shut lips smile hideously as he says,

"That was your giant torch, good night, Brita Stenbock!"

He drives the spur into the flanks of his black horse till it rears upright. "The wedding is over. The merry-making at Torpa passed off well; resume your work again, 'godfather.' Keep near me. Forward!"

A moment after these last spectators have vanished, and the burning house stands like a

forsaken spirit encircled by the smiling beams of the Spring sun—like the last fond kiss of that love which had silently grown and ripened there through many a year, till the storm came, and fanned the flames, and changed it in a night to ashes.

Yet the storm spends its might, and the fire its fury. But the sun is eternal, Karin, it returns each spring, and is new every morning.

King Christian II. was right. Before night-fall, Torpa will have passed away from the surface of the earth. But Brita Stenbock has spoken truer. Fire and sword cannot quench the spirits either of hate or love. And Torpa lies embalmed in these, as if it still stood and gazed upon the Trollhätta. It is not effaced from Swedish soil nor from Swedish hearts, Karin, for Torpa is eternal, as the sun.

Now the evening has come again, and clouds of dense, suffocating smoke rise from the smouldering ruins. Again the jackdaws cross the Götaelf, but this time only five emerge from the fissure in the rock where they have tarried for the night. They cross in a northerly direction. The moon scatters its pale beams over the water as the boat jars again at the same landing from whence Karin looking back had cried, "Farewell, Gustav Vasa!"

He has fared well. As he stepped from the tottering boat to the shore he recalled the words, but he cried instead, "Farewell, Gustav Rosen!"

"Farewell, Gustav!"—so said Gustav Erichson, so said Brita Stenbock. Both grasp his hand at parting—death has held it in his and purged it from its stains.

"Farewell!" He stands forsaken and listens to the footsteps dying away into the night. They echo ever fainter and fainter like the last message from an ended life, and are lost in the rushing of the falls.

He who would forget does well to sit upon the brink of the Trollhätta where the falling waters deaden memory.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A few short weeks have passed, but the dominion of winter is overthrown. Spring has come, not from the south, but from the north, from the rocky valleys of Dalecarlia. The Spring is named Gustav Vasa.

From lake to mountain there is none to rescue Sweden save him. The nobility is crushed, and it is well that its power is crippled, and it is unable to hinder with petty jealousy the emancipation of the land. There is a clash of arms in the cities where Christian's mercenaries oppress the townsfolk with heavy hand.

A broad tract between Copenhagen and Stockholm lies waste, the villages are burned, the inhabitants have fallen in battle, fled, or been put to death. The gallows and wheel mark the progress of the ruler of the northern realms since leaving Torpa.

His sickle Death is laid upon the awakening fields, it cuts down high and low, whatsoever comes in its way, without mercy. As each head falls, King Christian casts his evil eye abroad for its successor.

There is none to rescue Sweden save the people, the stiffnecked peasant folk of the mountains. Therefore have they gathered together from the mountains and valleys of Dalecarlia and under the open sky upon the great meadow which the Spring has strewn with primroses they proclaim Gustav Vasa "their own and the Swedish people's leader and chief."

Down from the hills came Gustav Vasa. With hundreds of followers he crossed the Dal-Elf, and thousands more flocked to his standard, for Spring had come. At Brunnbäck's Ford he met the treacherous Archbishop Trolle, and the arrows of his mountaineers smote hard upon the well armed knights. Red rolled the waves of the Dal-Elf into the Bothnian Gulf, it was the first retribution of the Stockholm massacre, and Gustav Erichson pressed rapidly on to the South.

"I said at Torpa, King Christian, that we should meet again; you shall see my face before the Sound lies between you and Sweden—" this was the message sent by a horseman to the Dane King. But ere this was nailed secretly by night upon Christian's castle-gate, Gustav Vasa had routed the Danes a second time at Westerås, and laid siege to the city; no longer with a troop of peasants, but with an army of many thousands. The place was defended by Slaghöck, the former barber and father confessor of the Dane King. This also was stormed by the peasants. Then when the summer sun stood highest, and day and night met, Upsala, the ancient city of kings, surrendered to Gustav Vasa.

Here he rested. The fiery enthusiasm of his followers was admirable in hand to hand encounters with the Danish troops, but their unskilled strength was inadequate to the tedious and prolonged siege of a stronghold like Stockholm. They lacked military discipline and drill of arms. Their weapons were farm implements and hunting-pieces, the axe which had felled the trees upon their native mountains, the bow and the sling which brought down the grouse, the pike which defended their flocks from thievish wolf or bear. But Gustav Erichson's eye and hand were ever active. Relying upon the promise of aid which Lübeck had once given, he

demanded firearms from the Hanseatic city, and himself taught the ignorant valley-men the use of the heavy musket. He chose out leaders to traverse the land in every direction and urge the inhabitants to action and to collect troops. Scattered detachments united successfully in attacks on the Danish garrisons of the smaller towns. The plains were soon completely enfranchised, and Christian's generals forced to retire into the fortified towns, more especially the seaports, which like Stockholm were kept supplied by the fleet with men and provisions. Brita Stenbock was right, in a few short weeks all Sweden had become a Torpa, and King Christian gnashed his teeth as he looked across the Sound from his palace in Copenhagen, whither he had been forced to return, by revolts, stirred up by discontented nobles in his absence.

Each of the scattered bands which had fought singly for Sweden's liberty throughout the land, now placed themselves willingly under Gustav Vasa's leadership, and acknowledged him as "their own and the Swedish people's leader and chief."

Thus all centred in Upsala, the old city of the kings, where in the gray past the mighty race of Ynglings had dwelt. It stood no more on its former sight, but a league farther eastward; only a little village hidden by lime-trees marked the spot where the ruins of the former Queen of the North lay mouldering under trees and vines. A venerable church with a square tower of massive granite blocks rose above the houses, a Runic stone erected in the choir spoke the strange and to the living no longer comprehensible language of the past. Hard by the church were three high-heaped mounds, the "King's Mounds," still known in the mouth of the people as Thor, Freya, and Odin; giant tombs possibly of the Ynglings, mythical reminders of the age when the gods of Walhalla descended to found empires and embrace the fair daughters of men. But now the north wind whistles through the beech-tops on their summits, and scatters the leafage upon the rough hewn blocks below the granite pillows upon which the grim heroes repose—which lean against the sides of their chamber of sleep.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Seated upon one of these stones, and looking eastward through the branches, one might perceive the great cathedral of Upsala, betraying at first sight the strong Old Gothic hand of its builder. Its twin towers soared above the gloomy "Skog," the primeval forest which co-

vered the plain with a confused mass of firs and pines, alders and birches.

At intervals, a glimpse might be had of the highway leading from Old Upsala to the new city, and blocks of granite and red porphyry were weirdly heaped upon the gray, rocky soil, some naked, some overgrown with moss. Here and there a lofty fern nodded sad and lonely in a fissure of the rocks. But the sweltering sun of midsummer defied the north and made the way seem long to the noonday wayfarer, though he might easily reach in an hour the square before the cathedral in Upsala. The great nave of the church was exalted above the one-storied houses of the town like a giant among dwarfs. They were mostly of wood, and the roofs were ornamented with green birch-bark. Upsala, where half a century before Sten Sture the Elder had founded the first Swedish university, was dull of aspect like the North. For its halls had been deserted for many a long year; science was silenced by the clash of arms, and the city of the kings, robbed of its former and latter glory, clustered mournfully about the cathedral, the one enduring monument of its illustrious past. Grass grew in the streets which had once been trodden by the feet of students, hastening rather from, than to the founts of wisdom; the few inhabitants hurried through the town with timid greetings.

Thus it had been a few weeks before, but one month of summer had wrought marvellous change. It decked field and forest with brilliant green, and altered like magic the city's wintry aspect. The streets were thronged with forms and faces of most varied type. The Dalecarlians with bony foreheads shaded by masses of straight-falling yellow hair, seemed to overtop the lower houses. Less angular and more comely were the sons of Gotland and Ingermannland. Easy to distinguish were the quick, receptive features of the town-bred man, who had seen the world and its phases beyond the Baltic, and learned the finer German customs. The latter, conspicuous in the throng for rich apparel, eagerly sought the company of certain portly, keen-eyed men, whose speech and manner bespoke foreigners.

These were the gentlemen from Lübeck, envoys of the Hanseatic League, who had landed with their ships at Norrtelge, bringing supplies of arms to the successful opponent of their old enemy and rival in the Baltic. Their purpose, moreover, was to inform themselves of the importance and extent of the Swedish uprising, and of the character of its leader-in-chief. They had come with keen, measured reserve, speak-

ing little, weighing and balancing; but the popular enthusiasm was infectious, and the reports, which found their way back to the Trave, expressed no doubt of the success of a cause which lay in Gustav Erichson's hand. They were frequently seen in public at the latter's side; often still, at nightfall, they crossed the threshold of his simple home whence they seldom re-issued before daybreak. At other times they mingled with him among the people, and admired, with scarce a tradesman's eye, the trim, full-necked peasant girls with their deep blue eyes and flaxen plaits wound about their heads, who pushed their way through the crowds and laughingly accepted many an over-bold flattery, which on an occasion of less universal joy would have been repulsed with a fearless and vigorous hand.

The fields, in the vicinity of the town, were converted by day into a camp, glittering with arms, in the handling of which Gustav Vasa instructed his eager followers in person. The horsemen displayed their skill upon short-maned, under-sized horses of incredible endurance, and the new firearms resounded from morning to night, to the gaping astonishment of the old men, for the generous policy of the gentlemen from Lübeck was not restricted to the supply of muskets, but included an extensive store of ammunition, an outlay which at that time was very considerable.

A more difficult matter in Upsala was the accommodation of the countless warlike and unwarlike guests from the north and from the south. But each inhabitant gladly offered a corner of his dwelling for the reception of the warriors. A spirit of exemplary order, of honesty and sobriety ruled in the over-crowded city. At evening time, when the martial exercises of the day were over, the air was full of music and singing. Those were the nights when an hour before midnight the sun stood, still golden, above the horizon. But song and tumult were stilled, every head was bared, women raised their children in their arms, girls pressed eagerly forward, and the hearts of the aged were gladdened, when Gustav Vasa's imposing figure passed through the streets.

So it was now. Though simply clad and not taller than his attendants, there was a nameless something by which even a stranger must have singled out Gustav Vasa, at first glance, from among his companions. It was the same face which had confronted Karin Stenbock that November evening by the Trollhätta, only with a more thoughtful brow, seamed and shaded here and there despite his youth with light furrows.

Upon the right side a wound stretched down to the temple, a broad scar, one evidently not made by a sharp steel. It appeared rather to be seared as was the hair about it. But it did not impair the manly beauty of the face, it heightened instead the impressive decision of the features. His eyes reflected worlds,—or concealed them, if their owner so inclined. No one pierced the depths of those eyes, neither the ingenuous, true hearted Dalecarlians, nor the shrewd German diplomats. Whoever thought he had penetrated Gustav Erichson's most secret thoughts found himself many a time deceived.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Thus it was with his attendants on this afternoon, as they halted beside him at the north end of the city fully an hour, whilst he, the ever active, sat motionless in his saddle, watching in the sultry July heat the road from Gefle. He must be expecting weighty news from the seaport in question, for he, who barely allowed himself time for necessary rest, seemed now all unheeding of the passing moments. His companions exchanged whispered surmises as to the object of his delay. Could it be a message from Russia or the announcement of the arrival of forces from Lübeck? True, the Hanseatic gentlemen knew nothing of such a project, but those inscrutable eyes of the young commander might harbor many plans without their knowledge or intervention. Therefore they waited no less expectantly than their chief, and patiently scanned the sunny road leading from Gefle.

Suddenly there was an almost imperceptible lighting of Gustav Vasa's eye, a moment later, the others perceived a dark spot on the horizon. As it came nearer over the dusty highway, and gradually increased in size, they found it to be an open travelling carriage, a rare appearance at that day and in that country. It was drawn by clumsy horses and occupied by two women, the one with iron-gray hair met the blinding glare of the sun with strange, unflinching eyes; the other, whose hair clustered like the sunlight itself above her white brow, cast her eyes down and turned away with studied care. The carriage rolled on past the waiting horsemen. Some turned their eyes with indifferent curiosity upon its inmates, others continued their low conversation, but Gustav Vasa, with a rapid movement, lifted his hat and bent low over his horse's neck.

In an instant every head was uncovered, and every eye was rivetted upon the young girl, the

recipient of this extraordinary distinction from their commander. With a deep blush the girl bowed in recognition, and her exquisite face and deep blue eyes were lifted for a moment to meet the rider's earnest gaze. The carriage rolled on without stopping. Turning his horse, Gustav Vasa rode silently back to the town.

It was evident that the object of his coming was attained. Gustav Vasa had spent hours, to be able to salute a girl and receive a smile in return. The news spread like wildfire through the city; this time it was the province of the women to surmise and speculate thereupon. But no one knew who the beautiful stranger might be, or whither she went. It was reported that the wagon had passed through the outskirts of the town and taken the road to old Upsala.

At an early hour in the afternoon, it reached the place in question, and drew up before a house of cheerful exterior, and more generous proportions than its neighbors, close under the shadow of the ancient church-tower. A number of men and maid servants were grouped about the entrance and received the travellers in respectful silence. Brita Stenbock alighted, and leaning upon her daughter's arm, entered the house.

Had Gustav Vasa's inscrutable eyes penetrated thus far? Every appointment showed solicitous attention to the comfort of the future inmates. Though less commodious than Torpa, it was luxurious and unlike the severe simplicity of the north. The furniture and the rich and costly hangings were not of Swedish manufacture. They betokened the wealth and enterprise of a great commercial seaport. Had Gustav Vasa in his demands for arms and ammunition for Sweden's liberation still been mindful of a garden for the Rose which he had so rudely plucked from its native soil?

This garden, in truth, better befitted the Rose than the inhospitable wilds through which she had wandered since the night when she had flown with the jackdaws over the Göta Elf. Since that farewell across the water she had not again seen Gustav Vasa. Horses were in readiness, and her father had lifted her before him on his saddle. They had ridden by night, and by day found willing shelter in remote peasant huts, whose inmates were awaiting their coming. Thus they had reached the wild and jagged mountain chain which divides Sweden from Norway. But they were not yet in safety; commands had been issued to the Danish garrisons in every city to be on the watch, and the king himself had offered a high reward "for the head"

of Karin Stenbock, dead or alive." They were therefore forced to take their way through the deep snows of the mountains towards the north. It was toilsome journeying, which well-nigh exhausted the strength of the men, but Karin seemed proof against weariness, cold and deprivation. The peasants looked with open-eyed wonder upon the slight girlish figure, which defied the assaults of the weather and the rough country, and many, who had turned a deaf ear to the exhortations of the men, would at a few inspired words from Karin's lips, throw aside axe and plow and journey to Dalecarlia, where the liberators of Sweden were gathering.

"I summon you in the name of Gustav Vasa," said Karin with glowing cheeks. Then they journeyed on. When they reached vast deserted valleys, where they had no company but their own thoughts, it was indeed a sad and mournful band. Of what had passed at Torpa after their flight, and of the fate of the blind wife and mother at the cruel hands of Christian, they knew naught. Not till the Clara-Elf was reached were they overtaken by a messenger with tidings of the rescue of Brita Stenbock, who had also fled to the north.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Karin listened shuddering to the messenger's tale, how Gustav Vasa and his four companions had held themselves concealed in the underground passage till the Danes should withdraw, and how the former at last, goaded on by suspense, had at the risk of his life forced his way through the passage and lain in a listening attitude among the heaped-up bodies of the slain. But he could gain no intimation of that which was to follow. He only heard that Brita Stenbock and Gustav Rosen were to be pinioned and left behind. Then from below came the sounds of the king's departure, and at the same moment he became aware of the glare of the torches, which approached nearer and nearer till he felt the heavy tread of an iron-shod foot upon his breast, the walls crackled and the passage was filled with blinding smoke. He sprang up reckless of danger and forced open the door of the hall. The altar and the motionless figures chained before it were barely visible through the smoke; a moment more, and his sword would have severed their bonds in vain, and his arms with Gustav Rosen's aid would have borne Brita Stenbock a lifeless burden through the blazing passage-way. Burning rafters crumbled behind them, and a falling beam struck Gustav Vasa heavily upon the head, but

he gained the rescuing door which led into the ground, and reaching with his burden the spot where his faithful Dalecarlians were anxiously awaiting his return, he sank, overcome by his superhuman efforts, unconscious to earth. An eternity elapsed before they were able to emerge, under cover of the night, and, unperceived and unmolested, regain the Göta-Elf, from whence they passed into Lake Wener.

Stenbock and his daughter listened with tears of joy and sorrow. Their home had vanished from the earth, their eyes henceforth should be blind as Brita Stenbock's, for that sight, and never more behold Torpa. But what was Torpa weighed against Sweden's liberty. Sweden was now their home. To Karin there came a prophetic voice telling her that her lot should no longer be linked to the narrow scenes of her childhood's dreams, but that her whole great Sweden itself, should be her home.

And what was the ruin of a house compared with the life of the mother, whom they had counted lost, whom Gustav Vasa at peril of his own life had rescued?

A deep flush mantled the girl's cheek at the thought. Was she pondering the words which the Trollhätta had witnessed,

"This hand is free, Gustav Erichson, and belongs to him who accomplishes two things?"

And Gustav Vasa as he sprang into the boat had answered, "Sweden's future be upon you, if it be lost for the sake of a woman."

Had he accomplished one of the two things? The throbbing blood in Karin's cheeks answered, "Yes." And the second? Could he also accomplish this?

And when he had, when he came and said, "It is done, Karin,"—what then?

Then his right was clear and undisputed to the reward which those other eyes had promised, to the hand to which he aspired. Why not?—The light of the eyes which mirrored the heart is extinguished. Not a ray shot from them when the messenger announced Gustav Rosen's fate, the lips were mute in words of sympathy. The eyes are extinguished like the flames of Torpa, and the heart has turned to ashes like its ruins!

But the fire smoulders long under the ashes, Karin, there is no fire visible to the looker-on, for the storm sweeping by holds the flame in check. But when it has spent its might, when the smoke wreaths pass, and peace returns, when summer breezes waft gently, gently over the ruined spot, then the slumbering embers wake once more.

So Karin journeyed on at her father's side through Sweden, and stirred the smouldering ashes to flame with the watchword,

"I summon you in the name of Gustav Vasa, who shall liberate Sweden!"

A burning flush and a deathly pallor would alternate on her cheek at the words. If Gustav Vasa should liberate Sweden was the second condition fulfilled?

Not till Western Dalecarlia was reached were Karin and her mother reunited. Stenbock left them here, and joined the army which rallied around Gustav Erichson. Karin persisted wilfully in her resolve to assume a masculine disguise and engage in the conflict. The care of her blind mother seemed to her a less sacred duty than this, which even her father's opposition could not shake. In this extremity her father appealed to Gustav Vasa and obtained from him the command for Karin to desist from her purpose.

As commander-in-chief of Sweden, he wrote, he should exact implicit obedience from all who would aid the cause of the country. Furthermore, that he was in the act of fulfilling Karin's request, and she should equally respect his wishes. He desired that she should proceed with her mother to Old Upsala, where a house was fitted to receive them. A carriage would be in waiting at Gefle, the exact hour of their departure and arrival at Upsala was prescribed. No detail from least to greatest was omitted by Gustav Vasa's watchful care.

Thus they arrived in Old Upsala at the house adjoining the church. There was nothing to alter, nothing to improve; every nook of the interior bespoke an almost feminine delicacy and care. If one chose to ponder the fact that it was the work of him who held in his hand the fate of Sweden, one must admit that the appointments of the house in the shadow of the lime-trees betrayed more than forethought and refinement, yes, more than gratitude and friendship.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Karin felt this as she wandered out towards evening into the open air. The afternoon had been passed in restless suspense, her eye had scarce left the road leading from Upsala. As if the tumult of the past weeks had unstrung her nerves, she started at every unexpected sound, at the opening of a door or a strange voice. Her unrest began to decline with the day, and she strolled out through the garden into the fields. She perceived with astonishment the three burial mounds which rose close before her, and enquired their names and meanings from an

aged villager. Then, threading her way through the deep, flower-sown grass of the meadow, she thoughtfully climbed the Odin's Hill, the central mound.

She seated herself upon a granite block which was still covered with last year's foliage; it had perhaps once served as a sacrificial stone, and the Runic inscription in the church would have told its history. It was a spot to forget the present, to live in the past and future. What was the weal or woe of the individual weighed against the rushing ebb and flow of the centuries? Whose voice echoed against the rock, before the giant oaks, which wave their crowns above it nightly, had sent their slender rootlets into the earth? Who in the ages to come, will know aught of this girl and of her high aspirations, who now rests upon it? Not for joy is life given to us, not for choice, but for duty. To serve others and further the right, albeit through strife and self-abnegation.

Karin murmured the last words softly to herself. It was late, but the sun still stood above the horizon. It cast a pale and greenish light in level rays across the silent valley. The peasants had gone to rest, for after a few hours the eastern glow would again rouse them to their labors. The little world about her was wrapped in slumber, while as yet illumined by a weird and sombre light. The gilt balls of Upsala's cathedral glinted across the dark firs into Karin's dreamy eyes.

"So thoughtful, Rose of Trollhätta?" asked a sudden voice behind her.

She rose precipitately and stood facing Gustav Erichson. She had scarcely seen him since the evening when she conducted him through the subterranean passage at Torpa, and at the last moment had torn herself from his passionate embrace. Since then Fate had reversed their position; he had borne her unresistingly through the rescuing passage way.

He had done far more—her glowing cheeks testified that all was present to her mind, yet she stood motionless as when his strong arm had rescued her that first time from the Trollhätta. Her restless eye noted the scar upon his forehead and the noble manliness of his bearing, but her lips were mute. His brow contracted as it had then, the happy smile died from his face, and he asked in a hard, unsteady voice,

"Still no word of thanks, Karin? Do you still refuse me your hand?"

She misinterpreted his words. Her lips quivered as she answered in a broken and hardly audible tone,

"Sweden is not yet free."

"You are right, but you, at least, shall be so." It was a tone of bitter reproach, of fearful suppressed passion. "He who stakes his life for the cause of liberty should look for no reward. He who strives for the liberty of a nation should not endanger that of the individual. I release you, Karin Stenbock, whether or no Sweden regains its freedom. Promises are lighter than air since Christian of Denmark visited Torpa. Farewell!"

Before the girl could reply, he had turned on his heel, descended the Odin's Hill, and mounting his horse which awaited him at the base, he galloped off in the direction of Upsala. Karin stood pale as death following him with her eyes. The horse plunged madly beneath the spurs of its usually merciful master.

When Karin recovered her self-control the distance was too great, and her repentant cry, "Gustav Vasa!" was uttered to the air. A nameless horror oppressed her, the sleeping world and the night sun swam before her eyes.

"Words are light as air since Christian of Denmark visited Torpa," she murmured, staggering back a few steps. Then her strength forsook her, and she fell with outstretched arms upon the ancient sacrificial stone.

The next day found Karin again upon the hill-top, but Gustav Vasa did not return. Day after day she sat upon the Odin's stone, looking with great, motionless eyes toward Upsala. The leaves rustled above her; each day was as a year. No news of the outer world reached her, and she desired none. Her world was within, and the patient dropping of the autumn leaves about her was soothing its strife to rest.

Weeks passed. The arms of the Swedes were everywhere victorious. Only Stockholm still resisted and was surrounded by a besieging army.

The news of its surrender was daily expected, when suddenly a message of terror spread like wild-fire from place to place through the land, the news that Gustav Erichson's mother and sisters, who had been since the opening of the rebellion captives in Stockholm, had been murdered at the command of Christian.

The tidings penetrated even to Old Upsala. It was told Karin towards evening, the messenger added that no-one had seen Gustav Vasa since the intelligence reached him, that he had shut himself up, refusing food and drink, and gave no answer to his distressed attendants. Those who had listened a long time at his door declared—though to those who knew him it seemed past belief—that Gustav Erichson was weeping.

Without a word Karin slowly wended her way

to her accustomed seat on the Odin's Hill. Here she sat as of old till the gold balls of the cathedral in Upsala began to glisten in the sun. Then she fell upon her knees before the sacrificial stone and pressed her forehead upon its cold granite. Some moments later she rose calmly and descended the hill, going not in the direction of her home, but towards Upsala. She walked on without slackening or increasing her pace till the town came in view. Here she enquired as to the direction of Gustav Vasa's house. A little child ran before and pointed it out. The officers who were gathered about the entrance fell back in surprise. They shrugged their shoulders as they pointed out, in reply to her request, the apartment where for two days past their commander had withdrawn himself from his nearest associates. But she knocked gently at the door and said,

"Karin Stenbock desires to speak with Gustav Vasa."

And to the speechless astonishment of the bystanders, the door was hastily thrown open. Karin closed it as quickly behind her, and fixing her eyes upon the pale and haggard face of the man before her, said,

"The word of a Swedish girl is not like that of Christian of Denmark. I will be mother and sister to you, Gustav Vasa."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was autumn. A year had passed since Gustav Erichson's first meeting with the Rose of Trollhätta. Evil and mischief in overflowing measure had been poured upon Sweden by the relentless Christian, though counterbalanced in part by the good which Gustav Erichson's instrumentality had wrought.

Meantime the earth had completed her annual round, bringing again the warm, sunny, northern autumn in her train. Beautiful was the blue arched dome of sky above the town of Upsala, and dazzling the golden balls of the cathedral towers which glinted in the motionless, sunny air below. In the distance, rising far beyond the green forest, over rocky cliffs and impenetrable thickets, one might descry the stately burial mounds of Old Upsala's kings, and more distant still a blue expanse of glass-sea. Everything seemed tinged with gold and blue, both heaven and earth. And great joy shone from the blue eyes of the girls, wives and men in Upsala.

The broad highway leading towards Stockholm was thronged with exultant crowds, not from Upsala alone, but dwellers from Westermanland, Südermanland and Svealand were there, and those also from the icy regions of Norrland and Norrbotten. All eyes were turned expectantly to the South, from whence he was to come—he, whom none needed to name—no longer “Chief and Leader of the Swedish people,” but Gustav Vasa, King of Sweden! For a week past the “nobles and commons of the Swedish people” had been in session at Strengnäs; two days before the Reichstag had chosen Gustav Erichson for their king.

He came with radiant face and mild, benignant look, so new to the people who had chosen him. His whole expression pictured as in a mirror the warmth and glow and sunshine of that autumnal day. The mantle of kingly ermine drooped low over his horse as he rode proudly by the side of the milk-white palfrey of Karin Stenbock, the royal bride of Sweden. She, too, smiled graciously in passing. She wore no ermine, but the jubilant throngs gazed in wondering admiration at her beauty and her hair, falling in sunny wealth from beneath the golden circlet. Thus Freya came upon golden-maned steed from the halls of Walhalla, shedding light upon the earth. Thus Freya looked upon the faces of men and smiled.

But the smile dies suddenly upon Karin’s lips, and is replaced by a look of strange and wistful abstraction. Her white arm is lifted quickly from her horse’s neck; something comes fluttering through the still air and lights upon the uplifted arm. It is a white butterfly, with shining red spots upon its wings. It rests as fearlessly upon her hand as upon the chalice of some autumn flower, and extends its delicate wings. The women see it and show it to the men, the royal butterfly of the mountains has come down to the valley to greet Sweden’s queen.

What means this rapt attention of Sweden’s queen, as she broods over the summer’s last messenger, the peaceful omen which the crowd greets rapturously? Is she listening to some sound from the West? Does she catch, faint and far off, the distant roar of the Trollhätta?

No—it is the rustling in the tree-tops on Odin’s Hill. Their withered leafage sways a greeting across to Karin.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The beating of the drums announcing the entrance into the city, rouses the royal bride from her reverie.

The burgomaster of Upsala, accompanied by his councillors, bends the knee before his king and welcomes him in a solemn address, whose conclusion is received with marks of approbation and relief. The procession moves on toward its destination. The streets through which it passes are transformed into a forest carpeted with reeds and pine-boughs. And now the great square is reached from whose centre the ancient cathedral uprears its giant form. At the main portal the Archbishop of Upsala waited arrayed in all the insignia of his office and surrounded by the entire clergy,—a stately and dignified man, fully impressed with the weight and significance of his position. The young king, though encumbered with his ermine, sprang lightly to the ground and lifted Karin from her palfrey. They bent low before the Archbishop, who preceded them to the altar. With rare intuition the interior of the church had been left without ornamentation. The slender Gothic pillars, like garnered sheaves in their wonderful beauty and chasteness, rose to the dizzy height where the canopied dome rested upon the nave. The stained windows shed a mild and softened radiance which mingled strangely with the light of the countless tapers upon the rich and costly altar. A great part of the immense edifice was filled by the royal suite, but behind them surged a mighty crowd, eager to cast one look upon the nuptials of King “Gösta” with Karin Stenbock.

But at the moment when the solemn ceremony was about to begin, a messenger pushed his way through the crowd and whispered some words in the king’s ear. The latter excusing himself with the promise of speedy return, disappeared. The curious crowds were full of surmises as to the cause of this sudden exit which could make him leave his beautiful bride with her father and blind mother. But they were soon silenced by the re-appearance of the king. He approached the Archbishop with a radiant face and said,

“Permit me, worthy father, to occupy your place for a moment. My message will not desecrate its sanctity, for it is holy and comes like yours from God.”

Lightly mounting the steps of the altar, the king cried in a tone which penetrated to the utmost recesses of the vast building,

“Two messages from heaven to the Swedish people. Stockholm is ours; this morning at sunrise the Danish commander surrendered the keys of the city!”

A great shout of triumph broke simultaneously from every lip. The last, long-hoped-for

goal was reached—Sweden was free! The joy of the populace was uncontrollable, they fell upon each other's necks with tears and kisses, and the thousand-voiced rapturous cry rose and swelled and mounted the high pillars till it was re-echoed from the dome.

"Long live King Gustav! Sweden is free!"

"And will remain so," sounded the voice of Gustav Vasa above the roar, "for I have another message for the Swedish people. The envoy whom I despatched to the court of the Emperor Charles V. has returned. The German Emperor formally renounces the cause of King Christian of Denmark. He acknowledges Sweden's independence and proffers his friendship. Furthermore, the Danish nation has revolted against King Christian and he is banished from the land."

His words were again greeted with thundering applause, through which one voice was plainly heard. It was the voice of Brita Stenbock crying,

"I see you, Christian of Denmark, powerless forsaken, execrated and abhorred. I see you bowed under the maledictions of your people, laden with the scorn of humanity, beating with ghastly brow against your prison bars. I see the mocking shapes of your victims taunt you with your evil deeds, and the throne you cannot hold. The prophecy is half fulfilled, Christian of Denmark, await the end!"

A shudder ran through the multitude at the words and at the cruel and relentless laugh which accompanied them, and which rebounded against the Gothic pillars like the wintry ice that Trollhätta dashes against its rocky sides. The light of Brita Stenbock's eyes was extinguished, but her hate was undying—it pursued its doomed victim over land and sea, rousing him from the exhausted sleep of despair to goad him on unceasingly to his ruin.

For a moment Brita Stenbock stood like an incarnate Nemesis, or Death itself, threatening Christian with its horrors, then she fell back insensible into her daughter's arms. She recovered quickly, but her agitation seemed to have been communicated to Karin, whose eyes had an ominous light as the king led her by the hand to the altar, whispering,

"The second condition is now fulfilled, Rose of Trollhätta—Sweden is now free!"

She did not meet his gaze, she answered, "Yes, the conditions are all fulfilled—Sweden is free."

"And you are its queen."

He felt a thrill pass over the girl's frame, a tremor of mingled fear and pride. She stepped firmly upon the velvet carpeting of the altar.

"In the name of God Almighty, I salute you, King Gustav of Sweden, whom the people have chosen to reign over them. Races of kings have come and gone in this spot. The priests of another faith placed the crown upon the heads of the Ynglings, the sons of Odin the Mighty. But they fell like the leaves in the autumn, and their memory is effaced. The proud race of the Folkungs received their crowns here from the messengers of the gospel, and were anointed with holy oil from Rome. But they have vanished like waves of the sea leaving no trace. Many came with proud name and haughty look and were crowned and anointed, but where is their record? For it is not oil from the hands of men which makes the small great and the weak mighty, but it is the Spirit of the living God, which is justice and liberty and humanity, which enlightens the great that their remembrance perish not from off the earth and their days be not like dust before the blast of the north. Therefore I welcome you, Gustav Vasa, to the ancient city of kings, and lift my hands in humble gratitude to the great King above all."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Thus began the speech of the venerable Archbishop of Upsala, his clear and melodious utterance fell solemnly upon the ears of the multitude, and swelled the heart of every hearer like the wind in the sails of a ship. Most powerfully they moved Karin Stenbock who looked proudly at the majestic figure at her side, upon the man whom she heard extolled as an instrument of heaven, who was adored by his people, and who had chosen her above all women to finish with her aid his work, to heal the wounds of strife with the balm of peace, and found a kingdom of justice, liberty, happiness and humanity. Yes, Karin looked for the first time, with pride and joy, at the white ermine which fell from the shoulders of her royal lover. Once more she seemed to hear above her the gentle murmuring in the tree-tops on the Mound, "To serve others, to further the right!"

How different had been the fulfilment from what she then had thought. How differently might a queen embody the motto which the sunlight over the sleeping world had engraven on her soul. No, this duty would be a choice, a proud and happy choice.

During the Archbishop's address Karin's eyes wandered from the vault above her to the faces which crowd about the altar.

But look! The beautiful eyes quiver and their lustre grows dim. They seem to be fixed

rigidly upon a column of red porphyry which supports the vault of the nave at the right of the altar. The daylight does not penetrate thus far, neither does the glimmer of the tapers, but the reflection of both enwraps it in a magic gloom. A strange frame it is for the head of one of the spectators, who leans against the pillar with eyes fixed upon the altar. There is something spectral as well in the light, as in the pale face it illumines. It is hard to discern whether the face is young or old. The features and the tall, slender figure are those of a young man, but they are belied by the hair which clusters heavily over the brow. It must have been blonde once, but it is as if sprinkled with ashes. The eyes likewise have an ashen hue. They are more lifeless than Brita Stenbock's lifeless orbs, which seem gazing into futurity as she listens to the words of the speaker.

Many an eye hung on the face of the girl so soon to be Sweden's queen, and followed her every look. And many turned to seek the favored object of her attention, while they questioned,

"Who can that be, with the strange face leaning against the pillar yonder? The queen seems to be looking at him."

"Hush!" was the answer," that is the envoy who has just returned from the German Emperor. He may well wonder at the angel which Gösta has picked up in his absence. It is plain to see that he never in all his life saw such a beauty. But listen to the Archbishop. Hush!" The whispering was hushed. All eyes were turned upon the prelate who now took from a costly tray two circlets, the symbols of plighted faith, alike with queen and peasant. Only Karin Stenbock's eyes did not change, only the eyes of the stranger by the pillar never altered their look.

"Karin," said those mute and lustreless eyes, "the ancient bard stood on the brink of the Trollhätta and looked down. Happy life surrounded him, the sun flooded his brow, the flowers nodded, the birds sang, and he shuddered before the power which beckoned him with enticing arms into the abyss. How often would he try to escape. But an evil spell drew his eyes to the roaring waters, and nearer and nearer he came, till the spirits of the deep claimed him for their own, and the seething torrent closed above him."

The Archbishop took the icy hand of the royal bride of Sweden and slipped the ring upon her finger. The great assemblage waited breathlessly.

"Karin," said those mute and lustreless eyes, "were those the lips that spoke, 'Be not weary,

poor Gustav, for if you should grow weary, and the stream had seized me, and it were too late to save me?' Were those the lips that whispered, 'Do not forsake Karin?' Was it Gustav Rosen to whom they said, 'For I love you so dearly—so dearly?'"

"God Almighty guard and protect you, King and Queen of Sweden, and lead your hearts in the way of happiness to the welfare of your land. His blessing rest upon you and give you peace!"

Like a simple citizen Gustav Vasa bent to kiss the lips of his wife. As one wakened from a heavy dream, the Queen of Sweden lifted her blue eyes from the face by the pillar. They wandered aimlessly to the flowing mantle of snowy ermine, then she tottered, and, stretching out her hands, fell into Gustav Erichson's arms with the cry, "It is the Trollhätta!"

Only one in the vast concourse understood her words. The rest saw the young queen fall into her husband's arms, but did not see how he was forced to support her unconscious form in his strong embrace and whisper words of loving comfort into her ear.

"The fault is yours, mother," said he turning to Brita Stenbock, "the past is dead, let it sleep. Why must you summon the ghosts of Torpa to mar this happy day?"

The blind woman made no reply, but her daughter raised herself slowly and spoke.

"The ghosts of Torpa," she repeated with her hand on her brow, "it is as you say, they are dead, let them sleep."

And taking her husband's arm, Karin passed out with a firm step from the church. The retinue followed, and lastly came the countless throng of lookers-on. Soon no one was left under the lofty cathedral dome, but he who alone had understood Karin of Sweden's words.

He remained leaning in the same attitude against the pillar, the altar-lights were extinguished, and the sun shed pale rays through the stained glass, but the mute and lustreless eyes were still bent upon the empty space before the altar. At last, the verger came and asked with respectful surprise, "Are you ill, Sir?"

Gustav Rosen started, looked enquiringly into the face of the man and went silently away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Outside when the bridal train had crossed the Fyrisö river, King Gustav paused for a moment and pointing to the west of the town where a green eminence sloped gently to the south, said softly to his young wife, "We will build us a castle yonder and be happy."

Karin raised her eyes to his. "Yes, from there we shall see the trees on the Odin's Hill," she answered gravely.

And now all flocked to the house which had been set apart for the reception of the bridal pair. It was the stateliest of the town, and a grand banquet was spread in its spacious halls. At the head of the table, upon chairs surmounted by the royal arms, sat the first King and Queen whom Sweden had known for a half century. At the left of Gustav Vasa the mild and earnest face of the chief prelate of the realm was to be seen. According to the ancient Swedish custom, numerous healths, or "Skals," went round the board.

How strangely like yet unlike that banquet-table which the Spring had seen in Torpa's now ruined halls! Many of the same faces still, yet how changed in expression! Gustav Stenbock's hardy features were relaxed in mild content, and the blind face at his side had lost its stern rigidity, whilst Karin once again sat beside a king of Sweden.

But not tremblingly, not with the fitful color coming and going in her cheeks, but with steady, earnest eyes, beautiful and calm,—beautiful as the mild autumn resting over Sweden's new freedom, and calm as the tree-tops of Odin's Hill soaring upward into the blue sky.

At the lower end of the table, sat as at Torpa, a silent guest. He neither spoke nor tasted food nor drink. Through the flickering tapers he beheld the Queen of Sweden, but beyond and above her, hovering in the dim and misty distance, a dream-vision of Karin Stenbock. He saw a rocky valley with the Trollhätta flowing through, and there in the beautiful springtide stood Karin with sun-illumined hair, saying, "Do not weep, Gustav, when I am grown I will go with you to Denmark!"

The vision beckoned and smiled into his mute and lustreless eyes, and the words it spoke were audible above the festive din. And then it said, through tears, in a broken voice, "Do not weep, Gustav, for I shall be your wife and mother too, and we will go together to Denmark."

A tear fell upon the untouched silver plate of the silent guest, and Gustav Rosen started again as his neighbor enquired, "Are you ill, Sir?"

He rose and was about to leave the banquet-hall as he had the cathedral, but he was arrested by a look from the king, who at the same moment also rose from his seat.

"Silence! The King desires to speak!" There was an expectant pause.

"We have drunk to the health of many gallant men, whose valor in the cause of liberty is

known to all. But who shall say how many hard struggles have been fought in secret. Let us honor those who had first to conquer themselves before embracing the just cause. I raise my glass in honor of the man whose arduous task it has been to win the German Emperor to our cause, and whose labors have been crowned with success. To the man but for whose courageous arm the noble mother of your queen would not now be with us—to you, Gustav Rosen!"

The King emptied his goblet at a draught and his example was followed by the rest of the company. Gustav Vasa thought only of the night in which he had rescued the doomed man from Torpa, and of the full and free confession of guilt he had then made, that in adhering to the cause of Christian he had served execrable ends. He had offered his services in aid of Sweden, and Gustav Erichson had with wise forethought entrusted him with a commission to the German emperor.

Had he thought to combine another purpose with the long journey? Unconsciously perhaps, but that was long since forgotten. For Karin's "Never" was fixed ineffaceably in his mind. When he had asked her on the Göta-Elf, "Will you return to Gustav Rosen?" and she had answered, "Never. Between us there is a gulf, as between this shore and the Trollhätta. My heart no longer belongs to Sweden's betrayer."

What did Gustav Rosen know of those eyes which bound Karin to Sweden? Or Gustav Vasa of the eyes which had loved Gustav Rosen?

And now Sweden is free.

Did Gustav Erichson's envoy dream perchance that he might thereby atone for his crime, and returning say to Karin, "I was blinded when I betrayed Sweden, but now I have aided the cause of your land and mine?"

But the way is far from the Trollhätta to the Alps. When Gustav Erichson again reached Upsala the bells of the cathedral and of all Sweden were summoning all to the marriage of their queen.

He was a proud and knightly king to whom she had given her hand; a strong, a wise and noble spirit. Was there a maid in the Swedish land who did not envy Karin her fate? And many a man prized Gustav Vasa's crown more lightly than the spotless pearl of Trollhätta's foam, which glistened in its golden setting at his side. She also rose at his last words. "Gustav Rosen!" he said and she had risen from her seat. She cast one look down at the end of the table—once more the queen had vanished and the dream-vision came and stood in her stead in

the banquet-hall of Upsala. But she turned aside and it faded farther and farther away into the dim, irrevocable past.

Night fell and midnight came, hushing the sounds of feasting in the bridal hall of Upsala. Silence rested on the great Swedish land, and in the north the Aurora Borealis shot up in sparkling rays to the zenith and kept watch over the ancient city of kings.

CHAPTER XL.

The morn rose fair and smiling to greet the emancipated land. The young king generously dismissed the Danish garrison of Stockholm to their homes. The claims of justice and humanity were once more enforced in Sweden. An autumn of rare and summer-like mildness greeted the new-won freedom; as far as the eye could range, the fields were green with the young harvest, and the trees were covered a second time with blossoms. Autumn seemed to have joined hands with Spring and to have triumphed forever over the might of winter. The peasants harvested their grain and looked with almost superstitious devotion upon their youthful rulers, to whom they gratefully attributed all the blessings which were now scattered upon the devastated and war-stricken land. Especially was it regarded as the gift of Karin, whose eyes watched ceaselessly over the needy among her subjects, who with the wisdom of age, and the winning grace of youth, fulfilled the grave duties of her position.

Her ear was open to all, and the appearance of her white palfrey on the outskirts of a village was the signal for the children to greet with joyous shouts the arrival of the "good queen." The king saw with delight how she won all hearts to herself. He was frequently her companion on these expeditions, but more often weighty matters of state kept him in Upsala. So Karin rode alone through field and forest, with a single attendant following behind. She was often so lost in meditation as she thus rode that she did not notice when her unreined horse stood still. She uttered no word of her thought even to herself. Her delight was to ride towards the sea, and from some elevation look out over its broad expanse. Her attendant knew that hours were as minutes to her then, but she was never displeased when he approached and pointed respectfully to the sun which was sinking rapidly behind her. She would turn her horse silently at this warning and ride back, and the inmates of the little villages along her route never saw the beautiful face of their young

queen otherwise than calm and gracious. Thus she rode home today. A year had elapsed since her meeting with Gustav Vasa by the Trollhätta, and she had waited longer than was her wont upon the hill, looking out over the illimitable stretch of sea where sky and earth blended in indistinguishable union. And today, too, she rode back till the square tower of Old Upsala greeted her at the right through leafless lindens. A sudden impulse seized her, she lifted her eyes to the lofty trees which cast their shadows from the burial mounds over the village, and motioned to her attendant to pursue his way back alone to the city.

Turning aside to avoid the village she rode through fields to the foot of the Odin's Hill, where she dismounted and left her palfrey behind.

"You will wait for me, I know," she said in a strange low voice, laying her hand upon its arched neck, "to bear me back to my palace home."

Slowly she climbed the hill. Perhaps her long riding habit impeded her progress through the dead leaves, for she often stopped as if weary and rested her head upon her hand. And now the summit was gained and the sinking sun shone full in her face. Its pale and greenish light fell aslant the quiet valley and upon the brown beech leaves which lay thickly strewn upon the ancient altar stone. But Karin knew every hollow of the rock as if each had been formed by a drop of her heart's blood. She advanced mechanically to the spot where her strength had failed when Gustav Vasa left her in his wild despair, and where she had sunk upon her knees and pressed her forehead against the cold stone before she herself had started on the road to Upsala. She staggered back as she had done then, and the calm face of the young queen was well nigh distorted again with passionate grief and her breast wrung by a cry of uncontrollable anguish.

Suddenly she was startled by a rustling among the dry leaves. The sunlight which gleamed across from the gold balls of the cathedral in Upsala was obstructed by a tall figure leaning motionless against the trunk of a tree a few feet distant. The man also turned slowly, then uttered a wild cry—it was Gustav Rosen.

Their blue eyes met over the ancient stone—met as they so often had done in the dim, unconscious days of their sunny childhood. Met in speechless, motionless sorrow. A moment and then—

Then the youth turned and with a convulsive sob strode down the hill towards the meadow.

"Gustav—" cried Karin. He heard, but did not slacken his pace.

"I command you, Gustav, stop! Your queen commands—"

But it was no tone of command, but one of sorrow unutterable; of entreaty, not command. With the sadness of death upon his face, Gustav Rosen turned and came back.

Karin advanced quietly to meet him, all trace of grief had vanished from her face, her heaving bosom was at rest, her eyes were calm as the autumn about her.

"We must say farewell for a time, Gustav—," her voice did not tremble, she took his hand in her quiet grasp. "Often as children we parted when the sun went down, and it always rose anew."

She pointed with her other hand to the fiery ball. The last withered leaf from the tree tops floated down and rested in her golden hair. She took it with a sad smile and offered it to him. "I have many flowers which you have given me in memory of the spring," she said. "They bloom by the Trollhätta, and now it is autumn, and I can give you no remembrance but this leaf."

He took it and crushed it to atoms in his hand. His lips parted in a whisper which could not hide his unsteady voice,

"Tell me but this, Karin, and I will leave you, tell me this, are you happy? Do you love Gustav Vasa?"

The queen fixed her eyes on the gilded balls of the cathedral towers.

"She who calls him husband is fortunate among women," she replied softly.

"Do you love Gustav Vasa, Karin?"

He repeated the question trembling and with violently suppressed passion. The fate of two human souls hung upon her answer, and Karin lifted her blue eyes to her lover's face and said in a firm, unshaken voice, "Yes."

Gone was the fair light of day, and the cool night wind blew shivering through the dusky air. A wild, passionate cry broke from Gustav Rosen's lips, he reached forth his arms madly and clasped Karin to his breast. But she freed herself quickly from his embrace.

"Sweden's queen walks unharmed through the solitudes of the forest, and enters fearlessly every peasant's hut. Will you alone abuse her

liberty, Gustav?" she asked mildly.

His hands drooped to his side and his eyes overflowed with tears. But once again her arms were about his neck and her eyes lit with all the splendor of the past looked close into his own. "Farewell, my Gustav," she said as she bent over him and kissed him.

Like a white star the Queen of Sweden's pal-frey vanished through the twilight and the pines.

Peaceful as of old she entered her home and smoothed her husband's careworn brow with the gentle touch of her loving hand. Many cares pressed upon the young king and banished sleep from his pillow. And that night as he lay sleepless, so say the old chronicles, Karin opened her lips and spoke in her dream. And as he bent over her she murmured,

"König Gustav lieb' ich gewisslich sehr,
Doch Gustav Rosen vergesse ich nimmermehr."

Nevermore! The waves of the Mälar hear it and roll it along. And Lake Hielmar bears it across to the infinite expanse of the Wener and out through the gates of rock—then come the falls of Trollhätta.

They approach like the fate of man, peaceful and transparent, kissing the nodding grasses that bend above them. Then a whirl and a more rapid rushing, unconscious of impending evil, but the stillness and transparency are gone to return nevermore. Faster they glide along, impelled by an imperative and irresistible force, till they are drawn at last into the devouring chasm below.

These are the falls of Trollhätta. The centuries are lost in the voice of their thunder. The boy who played by their side grows to manhood and his hair whitens. And when for the last time he totters out to them upon his staff, they are as on the day when first he beheld them, bordered with flowers like the Spring, and snow white like the Winter. They have thundered here thousands and thousands of years before a human ear was nigh to hear them. They dash their silvery spray far out over the rocks and the sunlight glistens and glitters upon it in gladsome colors. But beneath the dazzling, majestic veil the rushing and roaring waters are surging and sighing. Well for him who would forget to sit upon their brink where the falling waters deaden memory.

FINIS.



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